

The Impact of Generational Differences
on the Management of a Fire Protection District

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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Abstract

This research project analyzed the generational differences within the fire service in Illinois as a possible solution to provide a more efficient management of a fire department. Generational differences, particularly the educational experiences between the generations, created a disparity between the methods used to accomplish the mission of the fire department. The purpose of this project was to identify the educational experiences of each generation currently employed in the Illinois fire service and determine the preferred method of task assignment of the various generational groups. This will assist in identifying methods that fire service leaders may use to reduce the disparity between the various generations. Completed as a descriptive research project, the following four questions were answered: (1) What are the significant generational groups currently represented in the fire service? (2) How do the education and experiences of these groups differ? (3) What method of task assignment does each of these groups prefer? (4) What steps may be taken to facilitate the reduction of any disparity between these groups? To answer these questions, a survey was undertaken among firefighters in Illinois. The information gained from this the survey indicated that three generations of firefighters are currently working in Illinois: Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials. Also revealed was the rapid growth of the Millennials and the decrease in Baby Boomers in the last ten years. Specifically addressed in this research was the educational experience of each of these groups. Also addressed was the importance of experience and how it is related to training. Included in the recommendations are the importance in developing a clear path for firefighters to progress through to gain both education and experience. A second recommendation looks to provide a process to assist newer firefighters in completing non-incident responsibilities, while providing desired supervision.

Keywords: Generational, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Fire Service

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The Impact of Generational Differences on the Management of a Fire Protection District

With the increasing retirement of veteran firefighters, the Pleasantview Fire Protection District has experienced an influx of new firefighters in recent years and more change is foreseeable. This change has resulted in a greater mix of generations. A general perception is that these new firefighters are better educated and trained as they join the Fire District. In fact, this can be a frequent topic of conversation among both firefighters and Fire District leadership. During one such conversation earlier this year, Bob Mangano, a twenty-seven year veteran of the Pleasantview Fire Protection District felt that the generation gap is certainly a concern. He commented that throughout his career, he has seen the fire service transition from being the ones who primarily fought fires, to the “Swiss Army Knife” of municipal services. In this, he is alluding to the fact that the current version of the fire service is called upon to do much more than fight fires. He went on to indicate that he felt the fire service has moved from “Blue Collar”, firefighters fighting fire and other labor intensive responsibilities, to more of a “White Collar” attitude, including the expectation of firefighters to provide highly skilled tasks. Through these two statements, Firefighter Mangano clearly indicates the perception that the fire service responsibilities have changed and that a generational gap between veteran firefighters and those more recent hires has impacted the way firefighters do their job.

The problem is that the generational differences, and particularly the educational experiences between these generations, within the fire service have created a disparity between the methods used to accomplish the mission of the Fire District. This disparity reveals itself as the newest generation of firefighters attempt to apply their education while veteran firefighters, who have a more formidable bank of experience to rely upon, remain the predominant leadership group. This has resulted, to some extent, in the inefficient management of the daily

responsibilities necessary to administer the Fire District and a vast gap in how the various generations view their assignments.

The purpose of this project is to identify the educational experiences of each generation and preferred method of task assignment of the various generational groups in the fire service, and to then identify methods fire service leaders may use to reduce the disparity between these groups.

This is a descriptive research project and will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the significant generational groups currently represented in the fire service?
2. How do the education and experiences of these groups differ?
3. What method of task assignment does each of these groups prefer?
4. What steps may be taken to facilitate the reduction of any disparity between these groups?

Background and Significance

The Pleasantview Fire Protection District is a primarily career fire district located in suburban Chicago, Illinois and is responsible for providing Fire Suppression, Emergency Medical Services and Fire Prevention activities for seven communities. Career members, while eligible to retire after twenty years of service, typically serve more than twenty-five years with the Fire District, some even serving more than thirty years; the maximum time of service credited to a sworn firefighter pension. The Pleasantview Fire Protection District, as is typical with many fire service organizations, experiences turnover in personnel and, due to a significant growth in the 1980s, is expected to see up to twenty percent turnover among the sworn personnel in the next five years. This is a change from the previous ten years where the average turnover was less than 2% of the workforce annually (Pleasantview Fire Protection District, 2009). The longevity of employment lends itself to a wide disparity in employee age. Statistics obtained from the Pleasantview Fire Protection District (2009) further indicate that the firefighting force

range in age from 22 to 58 with an average age of 47. This age difference, in turn, leads to a mix of various generations, each with their own thoughts, beliefs and ideals. With this variation of generations, a perception suggests that a gap exists between the experience and education levels of the various generations.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) “2008 US Fire Department Profile”, there are more than 1.1 million firefighters in the United States. Of these firefighters, 75% are between the ages of 20 and 50 (Karter & Stein, 2009). Significant literature details the existence of four major generational groups in the U.S. workforce today. As with any aging process, while one generational group enjoys growth, others tend to level off, while the oldest group inevitably declines. This is particularly true in the fire service, where the oldest generation is rapidly disappearing, while the youngest generation continues to grow.

This research is important to the fire service in the United States and the Pleasantview Fire Protection District since it aims to identify the differences between the generations of firefighters, particularly with respect to training and education. Understanding these differences will allow a better understanding of how the newer firefighters may fill roles in the fire service and how to best apply their talents. This research also provides information that may assist in meeting the National Fire Administration (NFA) Goal 4:

Improve the fire and emergency services’ professional status. Which further indicates the NFA will “... will promote a nationally-accepted competency-based system of professional development” (United States Fire Administration, 2010, p. 14).

This project also directly supports the NFA Operational Objectives of “ensuring the fire service responds appropriately to emergent issues in a timely manner” (United States Fire

Administration, 2010, p.13) by defining the variations in education and training between the various generations currently working as firefighters. Finally, looking at the various generations and their educational differences will assist the fire service executive work in a more cohesive fashion, as expressed in the National Fire Academy's Executive Development course.

Literature Review

A review of applicable literature was conducted to attempt to define the known information about the generations currently employed in the workforce as well as within the fire service. A great deal of literature exists on the topic of generational differences in the workplace. While only a small percentage of this literature is specific to the fire service, it is clear that the fire service experiences employee issues that are typical to any workplace. In that respect, the information is of great value in defining the current situation and applying this general knowledge to the fire service. The literature is consistent in indicating the general delineation of four significant generational groups in the workforce today.

According to Lancaster and Stillman (2003), these four generational groups are the Traditionalists born between 1900 and 1945, the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), the Generation Xers (1965 and 1980) and the Millennial Generation (1981-1999). Another source divides the four groups to include the Senior Generation (born before 1946), the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1977) and the Nexters (1978-1989) (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). A third resource refers to the four generations as the Matures (born prior to 1946), the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation Xers (1965-1979) and the Millennials (1980-2000) (Marston, 2007). Additional references mimic the four general categories described above.

While all of these sources vary to some degree, the significant points are consistent. Each of these sources also point to the gap between the generations. Marston may put it the best

when he writes “Each generation uses the word *success* differently” (2007, p. 113). While these generations are clearly based around dates, they are really based around the experiences and common history the generations born within these dates lived through. It is also true that any classification of a generation is, in fact, a generalization (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). Not every person born between two dates falls into a category with certainty and the dates are fluid. In order to understand the differences, it is important to have a better idea of the four generations (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

The Traditionalists (those born before 1945) currently make up slightly more than 4% of the 155.3 million Americans in the workforce (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Likewise, the NFPA (2008) indicates that firefighters age 60 and over (born before 1948) make up 5.8% of the firefighters in the United States. Martin and Tulgan (2006) predict that the Traditionalist worker will virtually disappear from the workforce by 2011. This generation is summed up by Lancaster and Stillman with one word, “Loyal” (2003, p. 19). This generation was defined by the Great Depression and World War II, shaping them into a hardworking, patriotic group. They knew what it was to do without and certainly believe in “saving for a rainy day” (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). These traditionalists tend to value privacy, hard work, trust, authoritative leadership, and social order (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association Office of Diversity, 2010). Traditionalists typically have respected the system and worked for security. They believe in the traditional family structure and they prefer leadership that is directive, logical, consistent and respectful (Brown, 2008). This generation was often referred to as the “Greatest Generation” (Martin & Tulgan, 2006, p. 4).

The Baby Boomers were born between approximately 1945 and 1964 and currently compose about 38% of the workforce at nearly 59 million workers. It should be noted that

nearly 7.4% of these Baby Boomers are currently unemployed (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). This generation was the first to really live off the television with the number of TV sets growing from four million in 1952 to fifty million in 1960 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p. 21). Lancaster goes on to describe this generation in one key word as “optimistic” (2002). Many Baby Boomers started out with the attitude that they can collectively make the world a better place (Marston, 2007). While earlier members of this generation seemed to follow in the footsteps of the traditionalists, following the old-fashioned career path, willing to sacrifice to realize the promise that a hard work ethic could provide, later members had a very different experience. The later members of the Baby Boomer generation were ready to change the world. They had the feeling that they could make a difference and effect a change (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). The members of the Baby Boomer generation seemed to have an easier life than their traditionalist parents. This group is generally idealistic and competitive (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

Generation X is now the second largest generational segment in the workforce. Born between approximately 1965 and 1980, there are currently about 49.5 million Generation Xers in the workforce composing about 26% of the workforce and slightly over 8% are currently unemployed (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Lancaster (2002) uses the single word “skepticism” to describe Generation X. Generation X has seen a tripling in the divorce rate during their childhood years, resulting in a lack of belief in the permanence of institutions and personal relationships. Compounding the issue was the growth of the latchkey children led to Generation Xers counting more on themselves or their friends than the traditional family structure (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). The members of Generation X understood from the beginning of their working career that they could not trust their employers to make good on long-

term promises. They turned away from the traditional career paths and searched for immediate gratification (Marston, 2007). Like the other generations, Generation Xers were seeking security, but instead of finding this security in institutions, they looked for it within themselves (Martin & Tulgan, 2006).

The Millennials are the youngest and fastest growing segment of the workforce. Said to have been born between 1981 and 1999, only those currently born after 1994 (age 16) are considered part of the workforce. This group comprises about 26% of the national workforce with about 40.3 million potential workers. This group also represents the generational group with the highest rate of unemployment (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). While there is much speculation of how this generation will function in the workplace and what characteristics they might demonstrate, it is certain that much will be influenced by technology. This generation does not know a world without technology, the computers and cell phones have always been part of their lives (Ware, Craft & Kerschenbaum, 2007). But they have also been influenced by their Baby Boomer parents and that optimism that comes along with them (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). The Millennials were raised during a time of relative prosperity, the likes of which no other generation has known. Until recent times, they have not known anything else; they had not experienced hard times (Marston, 2007). The Millennial Generation is also the first generation that grew up in as “Global Citizens,” having been told repeatedly that they can make a difference in the world (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). Martin and Tulgan (2006) also contend that the Millennials are convinced that education is the key to their success and they have extensive experience with technology to use with this education. The Millennial Generation has an expectation of collaboration. They were typically raised in highly communicative, participatory families and have been included in decisions, particularly the

major decisions, since they were born (Marston, 2007). This makes them all too familiar with the day to day negotiation that goes on in a family, not unlike that of the current workforce. This will lead to a workforce that does not allow them to be pushed around, but they will be ready to work with others very freely (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). All of this combines to generate the thought in Lancaster (2002) that this could be the next "Greatest Generation."

To acquire a thorough competence of their job, firefighters and fire officers need more in depth knowledge. This knowledge is only gained through a professional development program that includes both education and training (Carter & Rausch, 2008). The distinction between training and education is a concept that has been widely described. According to Webster's Dictionary, education is "...to provide with information, to persuade or condition to feel, believe, or act in a desired way." However training is described as "...the skill, knowledge, or experience acquired by one that trains" (Merriam Webster, nd). Cross (1996) further describes the difference by indicating that education is measured by tenure, the student puts in the time in a class or a seminar. Typically, the student puts in the time and is then considered to have some degree of knowledge of the topic. He believes that training, on the other hand, is measured in what the student can do when the training is completed. Training is doing and training improves performance (Cross, 1996). Seaman A. Knapp is credited with the saying: "What a man hears, he may doubt; what he sees, he may possibly doubt, but what he does, he cannot doubt" (Richardson, 1994). This is similar to the saying attributed to Confucius: "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand" (Freedman, 2002). Schier (2006) indicates that education is giving out information and communicating to your trainees. Training is about practice and building skills. He further indicates that he feels that today's younger generation of employees wants to be trained, not educated.

According to Fire Officer Principles and Practices, the emphasis on training in the fire service is considered essential and has been that way for many years. Education has not been nearly as prominent in the fire service until recently (Ward, 2006). In 1966, an ad hoc group of fire service professionals met in Racine, Wisconsin to identify priorities and needs in the fire service. This group was known as the Wingspread Conference on education in the fire service. Of the twelve key points developed at this conference, five dealt directly with education of firefighters and fire officers. One point was emphatic indicating “Professional status begins with education” (Johnson Foundation, 1966). Similar conferences were held every ten years since and are known as Wingspread II, III, IV and V respectively. Each of these conferences indicated the importance of education in the fire service (International Association of Fire Chiefs Foundation, 2006). At Wingspread II, the focus was on the “educational void” near the executive level of fire officers (Clark, 1976). The Wingspread III conference noted the then recent development of both educational programs through community colleges and certification programs through many States. This conference encouraged the continued development of these programs (Johnson Foundation, 1986). By the time Wingspread IV was convened, the emphasis on training had developed further, at one point indicating that “Mid to senior level fire and emergency services managers must have college experience if recognition of their professional status is going to be maintained” (International Association of Fire Chiefs Foundation, 1996).

At Wingspread V, the most recent of the five conferences, the focus on training became even more defined. One statement from the conference indicated:

Universal acceptance and use of a credentialing system will help in professional development, but the availability of degree programs in fire science and fire department management are necessary to reach the level of competence needed for firefighters and

fire executives. Each state should have at least one two-year degree program available in the community college system, to provide basic knowledge and skills. Bachelor degree programs should also be available to firefighters who wish to pursue them, at reasonable cost. (International Association of Fire Chiefs Foundation, 2006, p. 8)

This conference, while acknowledging the change in the educational needs of the fire service, clearly felt the need to continue the development of the education process to provide a more professional organization. They felt that a professional fire service is important when responding to the needs of the community and working with other governmental agencies and the private sector (International Association of Fire Chiefs Foundation, 2006).

OSFM Division of Personnel Standards and Education (PSE) manages a program of training and certification for Illinois firefighters. As the primary certifying agency, the OSFM administers a variety of programs ranging from basic firefighting (Firefighter II) to advanced technical skills (for example, Structural Collapse Technician) (Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal, 2010c). A description of the programs evaluated in this research project is included below.

Firefighter II – This is the entry level firefighting certification. This is the prerequisite for all other firefighting certifications through the OSFM (with the exception of a “by-pass” examination used for non firefighters in certain programs). Currently, Firefighter II Certification is divided into three modules containing a total of twenty-three instructional units (Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal, 2010c).

Firefighter III – Currently under review, this certification will soon be re-titled Advanced Firefighter. Divided into three modules, it contains seventeen instructional units. This program is designed to advance the knowledge past that of the entry level firefighter. This program is a

pre-requisite for Fire Officer certification (Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal, 2010c).

Fire Officer I – This program is designed to prepare the entry level fire officer. It consists of five separate classes including: Instructor I (Basics of Company Instruction), Tactics and Strategy I (Leading the Initial Attack), Fire Prevention Principles (Officers Role in Community Fire Safety), Leadership I (Supervisory Concepts and Officer Responsibility), and Leadership II (Supervisory Applications) (Illinois Fire Chiefs Association, 2010). Additionally, the firefighter must have at least four years of fire service experience (Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal, 2010a).

Fire Officer II – This program is designed for advanced fire officer to prepare that officer to lead multiple fire companies. Certification requires the completion of four separate courses including: Instructor II (Developing Objectives and Lesson Plans), Tactics and Strategy II (Fundamentals of Incident Command), Leadership III (Personnel Policy and Resources), and Leadership IV (Community, Government Labor/Management Relations). Applicants for certification must also have obtained five years of fire service experience, certification as a Fire Officer I and one year of Fire Officer II trainee experience (Illinois Fire Chiefs Association, 2010).

Fire Officer III – “A Fire Officer III is a person who has administrative responsibilities, the authority to affect practices, policies, and procedures of the department, and is or reports directly to the Chief, Chief Administrator or head of department” (Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal, 2010, p. 1). This program requires an evaluation of undergraduate coursework and/or the completion of up to forty-eight blocks of instruction. Also required is an evaluation of the application and a demonstration of administrative duties. Fire Officer II is a prerequisite for this certification (Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal, 2010).

According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education (2010), there were 4352 degree accredited programs in the United States in 2008, compared with 1851 in 1950. These statistics also reveal that in 2008 there were 1,371,390 students enrolled in these institutions compared to 244,900 students in 1950. Looking further, the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) reports that in 1950 there were 151,325,798 people living in the United States, compared to the estimated 304,374,846 residents today. According to a special report by the US Census Bureau in 2000, the increase in 32.7 million people in the 1990s was the largest decade of growth in any decade in U.S. history. The same report notes that the density level (average number of people per square mile) was at 80. This is a twofold increase in the past century, yet remains well below the worldwide population density of 120 people per square mile. In 1910, only five states had a majority of their populations living in metropolitan areas and no state had 75 percent or more of its population living in metropolitan areas, thirty-three states had less than 25 percent of their populations living in metropolitan areas and 19 of these had no metropolitan residents. By 1950, the number of states with a majority metropolitan population had tripled. In 2000, at least 50 percent of the population in 37 states lived in metropolitan areas and no state had less than 25 percent metropolitan population. This included eight states that had populations that were more than 90 percent metropolitan (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The fire service in the United States has a proud tradition of courage and bravery in response to both the minor and catastrophic incidents that have faced this nation. The first fire departments claim their origins in the Roman Empire and much of the current rank structure has evolved from the military structure of the Romans. The first recorded fire occurred in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 and by 1630, Boston, Massachusetts had adopted the first fire code in the United States. Boston also established the first paid fire department in 1679 and Benjamin

Franklin was a founder of the first volunteer fire company in Philadelphia in 1735. Numerous tragic fires in the years since have helped shape the fire service. Firefighter training and education have come a long way since the first fire companies were established. While the early firefighters simply needed to be strong enough to pass buckets or operate a hand pump for a long period of time, as the equipment became more complex, so did the need to formalized training and education. Today's firefighters are responsible for not only firefighting, but highly technical rescues, hazardous materials mitigation and numerous other specialty services. Most fire departments provide some type of emergency medical response, many providing highly skilled advanced medical services (International Fire Service Training Association, 2004).

Procedures

The procedures used for conducting this applied research project included a lengthy review of pertinent literature including both fire service and general workplace environments. As the literature review continued, it was obvious that a significant generational difference centered on education. It also became readily apparent that the availability of educational statistical data was extremely limited and that a source for educational data within the fire service was even scarcer. This lack of data encouraged an attempt to collect some of this data, and the research project was further focused to significantly address the educational differences between generations.

The next steps involved requests for information from both the Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Illinois Fire Service Institute. Finally, a survey was developed and conducted of firefighters of various generations. This survey was intentionally designed to be completed only by firefighters in Illinois. While this was clearly considered a limiting factor in this research, by limiting the focal group, the research lent itself to a more direct comparison.

The literature review was started at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland in March 2010 while attending the *Executive Development* course offered as the first part of the Executive Fire Officer Program. This research focused on the challenges faced while working with a variety of generations in one workplace. Particular attention was paid to the generational environment in the fire service. From this initial research, the understanding of the problem was clarified and the initial problem was defined. Additional research was conducted at the Northeastern Illinois University Library; the Illinois Fire Service Institute Library; the Ft. Myers Beach, Florida Public Library; and the Riverside, Illinois Public Library. Through the Riverside Public Library and the Metropolitan Library System, libraries were searched throughout Northern Illinois. This search produced a number of excellent resources discussing the impact of the various generations on the typical workplace and offering a number of suggestions to increase the efficiency when these generations work together. Finally, an internet search of topical articles supplied a number of current sources.

Two email requests for information were made, one to the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal and one to the Illinois Fire Service Institute. The first request for information was made to Mitzi Woodson, Director of the Division of Personnel Standards and Education, Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal. The request sought demographic data concerning Illinois firefighters, for as many years as the information was available. The request also sought information concerning the current and historical data related to the basic firefighting programs and the fire officer programs administered by the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal. The request was very beneficial as the information assisted in defining the progression of firefighter training in Illinois. A copy of this request and the statistical information is included as Appendix A and Appendix B.

The second request was to the Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI). Chartered in 1980, the IFSI is the legally mandated fire service training academy in Illinois. The mission of IFSI is “Helping firefighters do their work through training, education, information and research” (Illinois Fire Service Institute, 2010). The request to IFSI was made to the Deputy Director, David Clark. The IFSI, for at least the last twenty-five years (the exact time is unknown) has collected a variety of demographic information from each applicant to their programs. Included in this information was a question regarding the education level of the applicant. Since this information related directly to the generational question at hand, it was thought this information was ripe for this current project. Unfortunately, after a number of contacts, it was determined that while this information is and has been collected, it was not available in any usable format.

The final step in the research was the design and implementation of a survey of Illinois firefighters. The survey was designed to gather demographic information, as well as educational information from firefighters in Illinois. The survey was initially provided to five members of the Pleasantview Fire Protection District. Comments from the five participants were reviewed and one survey question was altered slightly. The survey was then provided to fifteen members of the Pleasantview Fire Protection District. This survey did not result in any negative comments from the participants and the decision was made to publish this survey among the firefighters in Illinois on a commercial web based survey provider through email requests and at training sessions. It was also forwarded through email to all the members of the Pleasantview Fire Protection District. The survey consisted of twenty multiple choice questions. A copy of the survey form is attached as Appendix C. The link to this website was published to a number of fire service organizations in Illinois. The survey was allowed to collect responses for thirty days. In these thirty days, 157 responses were returned. These requests were collected through the

survey provider and all the responses were exported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis and review. Eight surveys were incomplete and removed from consideration. This produced a sample that considered 149 results.

Results

Survey Results

The survey conducted for this project consisted of twenty questions. Many of these questions allowed multiple answers. The survey was posted for one month, from August 3, 2010 until September 3, 2010. In total, 157 surveys were attempted. In reviewing the results, eight responses were incomplete and the decision was made that they would not be evaluated in this project. The discarded surveys included five from Baby Boomers, two from Generation X and one Millennial. The final result was 149 surveys that were evaluated as part of this project.

Survey Question One – What year were you born?

The respondents to the survey were required to choose a date before 1950, in five year blocks between 1950 and 1990 and after 1990. These results were then grouped into generational categories. Fifty-nine of the surveys or 40% of the total were completed by members of the Baby Boomer Generation (born prior to 1965), sixty-five (44%) were completed by members of Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and twenty-five (17%) were completed by members of the Millennial generation (born in 1981 and later). This grouping was a key classification in evaluating the remaining questions.

Survey Question Two – What year did you join the fire service?

(Do not include Cadet, Junior Firefighter or Explorer programs)

The respondents to the survey were required to choose a date before 1980, in five year blocks between 1980 and 2009, and during 2010. The results of this question indicate the

predictable result that the number of Baby Boomers entering the fire service is decreasing, while the number Millennials is growing. In the last ten years, forty-six survey respondents entered the fire service. Of these, twenty-five (54%) were Millennials, eighteen (39%) were from Generation X and only three (7%) were from the Baby-Boomer Generation. The survey also reveals that while no Millennials entered the fire service before 2000, eleven (42%) of the twenty-six hired in the following five years were Millennials. Table One (below) indicates percentage of firefighters hired in a particular year grouping, organized by generational group.

Table 1- Year of Hire by Generational Group

	Baby Boomer Generation		Generation X		Millennial Generation	
Hired Year:	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Before 1980	18	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Between 1980 and 1984	23	88%	3	12%	0	0%
Between 1985 and 1989	7	37%	12	63%	0	0%
Between 1990 and 1994	7	29%	17	71%	0	0%
Between 1995 and 1999	1	6%	15	94%	0	0%
Between 2000 and 2004	2	8%	13	50%	11	42%
Between 2005 and 2009	1	5%	5	26%	13	68%
During 2010	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%

Survey Question Three – Which type of fire department are you currently part of?

(Choose all that apply)

The available choices included Volunteer (not paid), Paid on Call or Part Time, or Career (full time occupation). This question resulted in 173 responses from the 149 surveys. The extra responses were attributed to the fact that nineteen respondents worked at both a paid on call and career departments; two respondents worked at volunteer, paid on call and career departments; and one worked at both a volunteer and career department. Of the Baby Boomer respondents, 12% were members of Volunteer Departments, 24% were members of Paid on Call or Part-time Departments and 64% were members of Career Departments. When considering Generation X members, 9% were members of Volunteer Departments, 23% Paid on Call or Part Time and 68% worked at Career Departments. Finally, 14% of the Millennials worked at Volunteer Departments, 45% at Paid on Call or Part-time and 41% are Career firefighters. Looking at things a little differently, when considering Volunteer fire departments, Baby Boomers make up 42%, Generation Xers make up 37% and Millennials make up 21%. This differs from the respondents who were Paid on Call or Part –time firefighters where 34% were Baby Boomers, 38% were Generation Xers, and 28% were Millennials. The Career Departments consisted of 40% Baby Boomers, 49% Generation Xers, and 11% Millennials.

Survey Question Four – Which of the following best indicates your current job description?

The choices available for this question included Firefighter, Line Officer, Shift Commander and Administrator/Chief Officer. Of all the respondents, 82 or 55% indicated that they were currently functioning as Firefighters, 34 (23%) as line officers, 11 (7%) as shift commanders and 22 (15%) as an administrator or chief officer. Of note with these results, sixteen of the twenty-two chief officers were Baby Boomers (73%) and twenty-five of thirty-

three senior officers (76%) were Baby Boomers. Eight (12%) Generation Xers responded that they were senior officers, accounting for 24% of the senior officers; no Millennials described themselves as a senior officer. When considering line officers, seventeen were Baby Boomers, sixteen were from Generation X and only one millennial considered himself a line officer. Table 2 (below) indicates the responses by generational group and the percentage of that generational group that falls into that job classification.

Table 2 - Organizational Assignments by Generational Group

	Firefighters		Line Officers		Shift Commanders		Administrators	
All Groups	82	55%	34	23%	11%	7%	22	15%
Baby Boomers	17	29%	17	25%	9%	15%	16	27%
Generation X	41	63%	16	29%	2%	3%	6	9%
Millennials	24	96%	1	4%	0%	0%	0	0%

Figure 1 below indicates the percentage of each job classification occupied by the different generational groups.

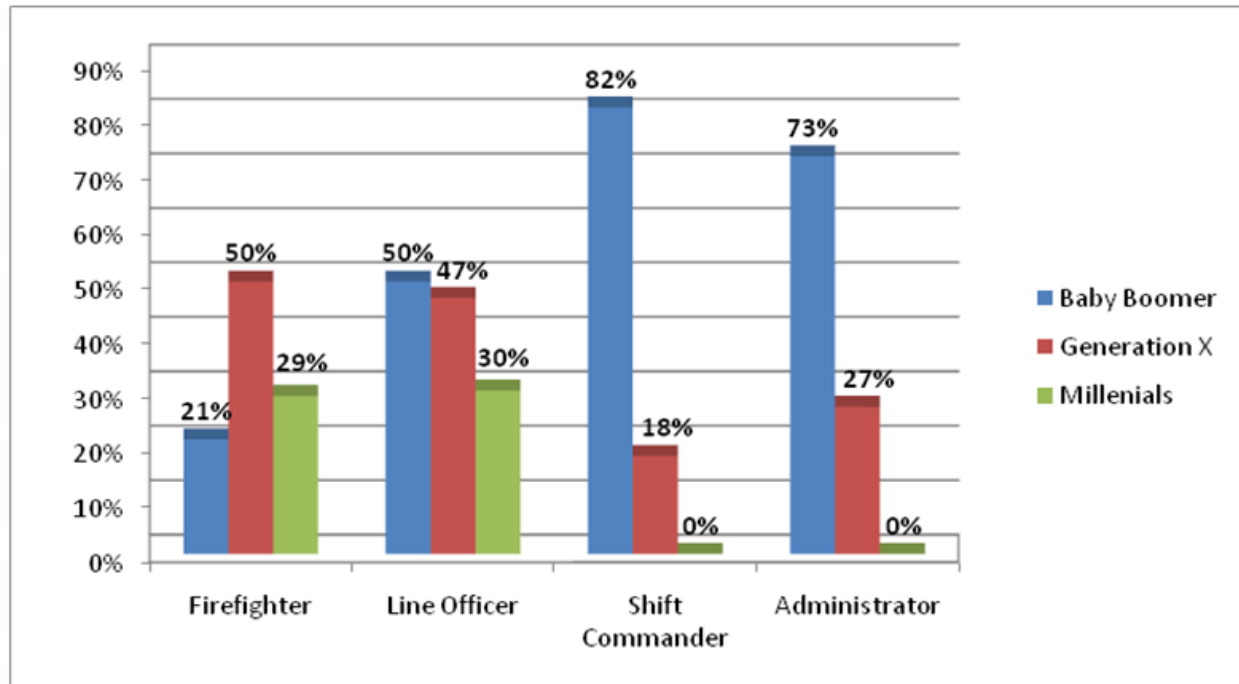


Figure 1 - Assignment by Generational Group

Questions five through nine revolved around the educational experiences and goals of the respondents. As such, the available choices were identical, with the intention of developing a timeline describing the education of each respondent. Respondents were instructed to choose all answers that apply for each of the five questions. Each of the questions allowed for twelve possible responses. The first choice was No Education Requirement. The next five choices centered on education. The choices were:

- High School Diploma;
- Some College;
- Associates Degree;
- Bachelor's Degree; and
- Advanced (Masters/Doctoral) Degree.

The following four choices questioned fire related certification and included:

- OSFM Firefighter II Certification;
- OSFM Firefighter III Certification;
- OSFM Fire Officer I or II Certification; and
- OSFM Fire Officer III Certification.

The final two choices questioned Emergency Medical Licensure and included:

- IDPH EMT-A or EMT-B Licensure and
- IDPH EMT-I or EMT-P Licensure.

Survey Question Five – When you were hired, which of the following were REQUIRED prior to hiring?

Nineteen of the respondents indicated that they had no education requirement at time of hire. Of these nineteen responses, eleven were from Baby Boomers, six from Generation X and two from Millennials. One hundred and twenty-seven respondents (85%) indicated that a high school diploma was required at time of hire. This requirement was statistically similar for all generational groups. Only ten, or less than 7%, of the respondents indicated that any type of college was required at time of hire. None of the respondents indicated that a bachelor degree or higher degree was required at time of hire.

Thirty eight (26%) of the respondents indicated that one or more types of OSFM (Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal) certifications were required at the time of hire. Of those respondents who indicated that OSFM certification was required, seven (18%) were Baby Boomers, twenty-one (58%) were from Generation X, and nine (24%) were Millennials. When looking at the three generations, this survey indicates that only ten percent of the Baby Boomers were required to have OSFM certification at time of hire, while over one-third of the other generations, thirty-four percent of Generation X and thirty-six percent of the Millennials, were required to have OSFM certification as a Firefighter II, at a minimum.

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) licenses Emergency Medical Service (EMS) providers in Illinois. The Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) licenses typically required by some fire departments include EMT-B (formerly EMT-A), EMT-I and EMT-P. Fifty-six of the respondents (38%) indicated that they were required to have an IDPH license at

time of hire. Fifty-two percent of both the Generation X respondents and Millennials indicated that they were required to have an IDPH license, while only fifteen percent of the Baby Boomers indicated this requirement. Also indicative is the fact that only five percent of the Baby Boomers indicated a requirement for an advanced license, while forty-two percent of Generation Xers and forty percent Millennials required an advanced IDPH license. Figure 2 (below) indicates the education required at time of hire.

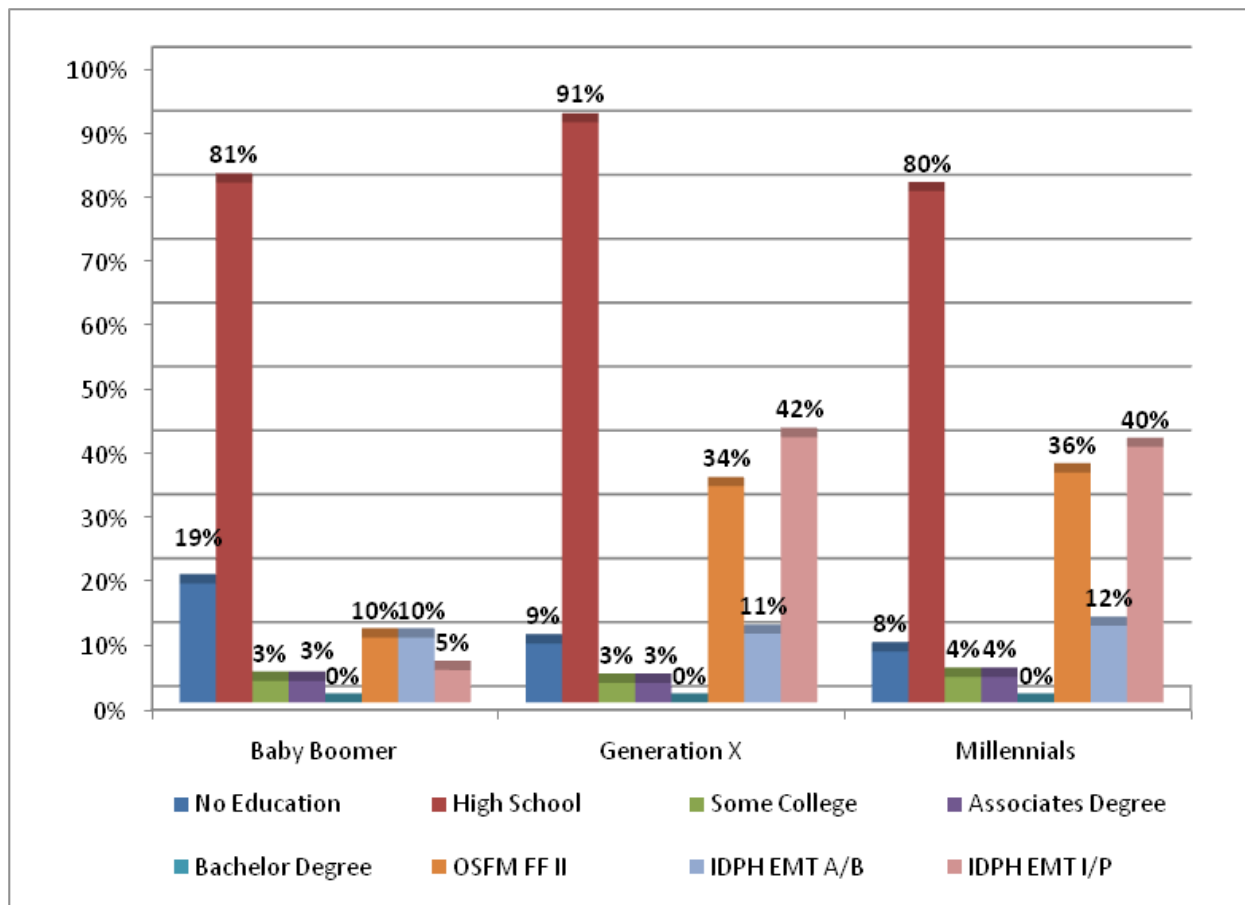


Figure 2 - Education Requirement at Time of Hire by Generational Group

Survey Question Six – When you were hired, which of the following did you have prior to hiring?

Of all the respondents to this question, only two (both Baby Boomers) indicated that they had no education when they were hired. Twenty four of the respondents indicated that the

highest education level they had attained prior to hiring was a high school diploma. Of these, fifteen (63%) were Baby Boomers, eight (33%) were Generation Xers and one (4%) was a Millennial. When compared to the number of respondents from each generation, 25% of the Baby Boomers did not have more than a High School education, where 12% of the Generation Xers fell into this category and only one of the Millennials who responded to this survey did not continue their education past high school. Viewed another way, 71% of the Baby Boomers had attended some college while 88% of the Generation Xers and 96% of the Millennials had attended college. Also interesting, was the fact that nine (15%) of the Baby Boomers, twelve (18%) of the Generation Xers, and three (12%) of the Millennials answered that they had obtained a Bachelor Degree. It was also of note that three Generation Xers had obtained advanced degrees, while no members of either other generation had.

Sixty-nine of the respondents indicated that they had obtained OSFM Firefighter II (FF II) certification at the time they were hired. Twenty of these were Baby Boomers, thirty-seven were generation Xers and forty-eight were Millennials. This indicates that 34% of the Baby Boomers, 57% of Generation Xers, and 48% of Millennials had obtained OSFM FF II certification at date of hire. Nine Baby Boomers (15%), nineteen Generation Xers (29%) and three Millennials (12%) had obtained OSFM certifications above the OSFM FF II level.

When reviewing the IDPH Licensure levels, ninety-eight, or 66% of the respondents had obtained some type of IDPH license by time of hire. The number of Baby Boomers included twenty-seven respondents or 46% of the Baby Boomers who responded to the survey. Of the twenty-seven Baby Boomers, only six had an Advanced IDPH License at time of hire. Fifty Generation Xers (77%) indicated they had an IDPH license at time of hire and thirty-six of the fifty (72%) had an Advanced IDPH License. Finally, twenty-one Millennials (84% of the

Millennial respondents) indicated they had an IDPH License at time of hire and 14 (66%) of those had an advanced IDPH License. Figure 3 (below) demonstrates the percentage of respondents the education they had obtained at time of hire by generational group.

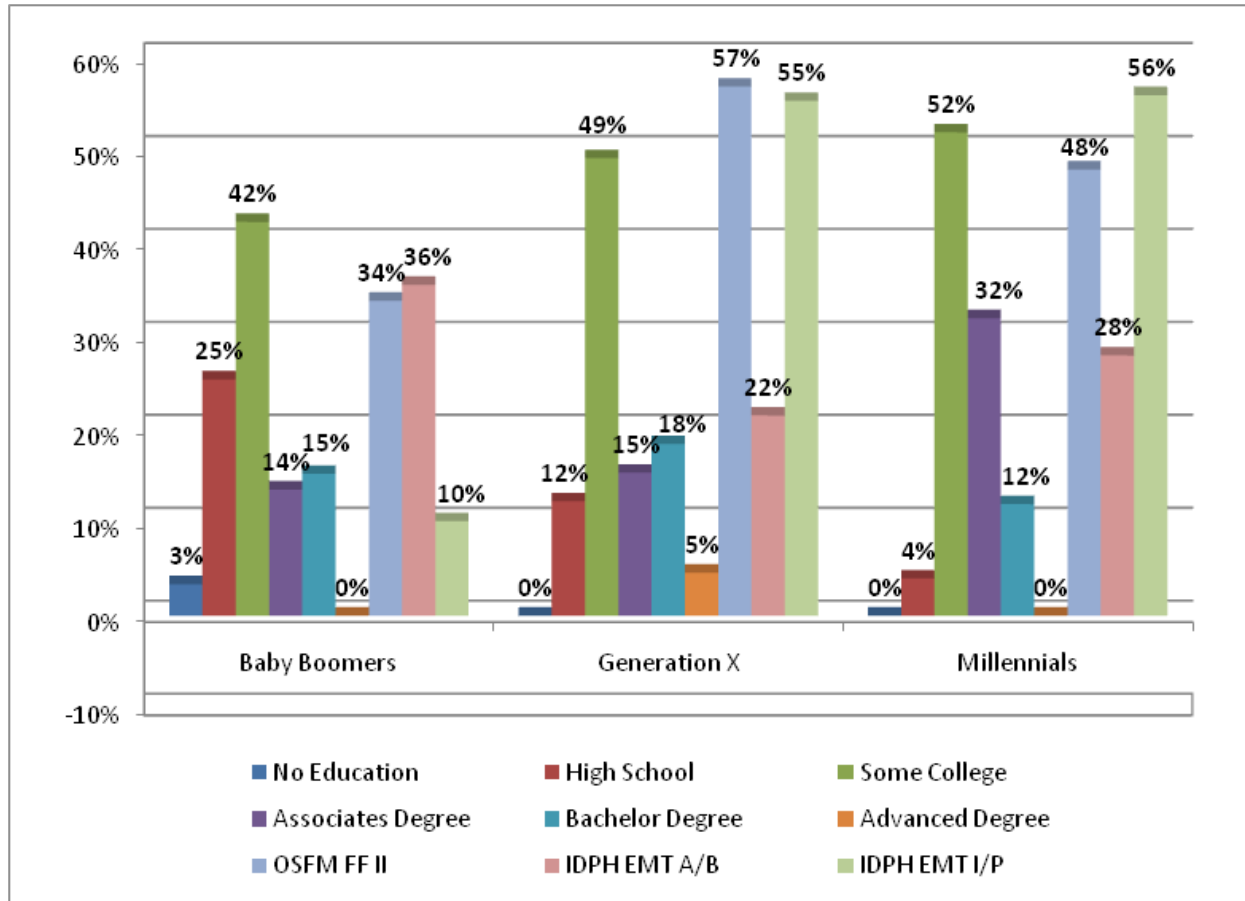


Figure 3 - Education at Time of Hire by Generational Group

Survey Question Seven – In your current position, which of the following are you REQUIRED to have?

Of the 149 respondents, eight indicated that they had no education requirement in their current position, while twenty eight indicated that at a minimum, some college is required. Of the twenty-nine with a college requirement, sixteen (55%) were Baby Boomers. Of the thirty-four respondents who indicated that an OSFM Fire Officer I or II certification is required, Baby

Boomers comprised twenty (or 34% of Baby Boomers responding) of these thirty-four, Generation Xers comprised thirteen (22%) and one Millennial indicated this was a requirement of their current job. Only twelve indicated that they were required to have an OSFM Fire Officer III certification, including ten Baby Boomers and two Generation Xers. No Millennials indicated they were required to have Fire Officer III certification.

Survey Question Eight – Which of the following do you currently have?

Overall, 94% of the survey respondents indicated that they had at least some college, including 92% of the Baby Boomers, 94% of the Generation Xers and 100% of the Millennials. When examining the number of respondents who obtained a college degree, ninety-six (64%) indicate degree completion, including 71% of the Baby Boomers, 66% of the Generation Xers and 44% of the Millennials. When looking at Bachelor's degrees, 31% of both Baby Boomers (18) and Generation Xers (20) had obtained the degree, while only 12% of the Millennials (8) had reached this achievement. Also, 14% of both the Baby Boomers (8) and Generation Xers (9) had obtained a Masters Degree, while no Millennials had this achievement.

While nearly all the respondents indicated that they have been certified by OSFM as Firefighter II, ninety-seven (65%) have listed obtaining OSFM Firefighter III certification. Of these, forty-one (69%) of the Baby Boomers, fifty-two (80%) of the Generation Xers, and four (16%) of the Millennials had indicated they obtained OSFM Firefighter III certification. When looking at OSFM Fire Officer I or II certification, eighty-three (56%) indicated they had at least Fire Officer I certification. Of those with Fire Officer certification, forty-three (73%) of the Baby Boomers, thirty-eight (58%) of the Generation Xers, and two (8%) of the Millennials indicated they had obtained at least Fire Officer I status. Twenty-two of the respondents (15%) indicated that they obtained Fire Officer III certification. Of these respondents, fourteen (24%) were Baby

Boomers and eight (12%) were Generation Xers. No Millennials had obtained this certification.

Of the 149 respondents, 140 indicated that they had obtained IDPH licensure, fifty-five (39%) as a basic EMT (EMT A or B) and eighty-five (61%) as advanced medical responders (EMT I/P). In all, 85% of the Baby Boomers and 100% of both the Generation Xers and Millennials indicated they had obtained an IDPH License. While 54% of the Baby Boomers with IDPH Licensure indicated they had a basic license, 31% of Generation Xers and 32% of Millennials indicated the same. This is compared to 46% of the Baby Boomers, 69% of the Generation Xers and 68% of the Millennials who had obtained an advanced IDPH license.

Figure 4 (below) demonstrates the percentage of respondents and the education they indicated they currently have, grouped by generation.

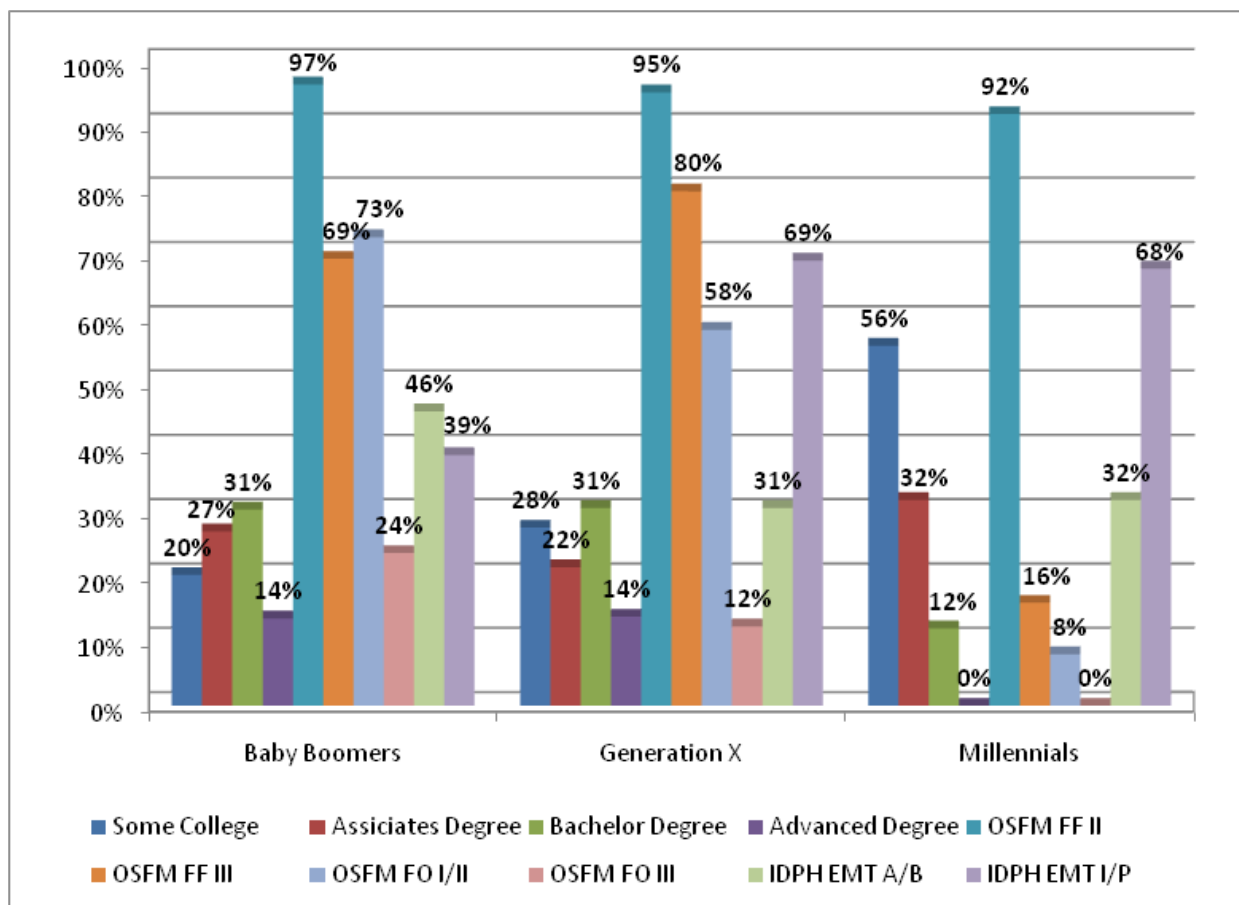


Figure 4 - Education Currently Obtained

Survey Question Nine – During your fire service career, which of the following do you expect to obtain.

Please do not include those you already have.

While some Baby Boomers and Generation Xers indicated that they would not be seeking any of the listed education in the future, all of the Millennials indicated they would seek further education. Of the respondents, eighty-two indicated they would be seeking formal degrees, for this analysis, only the most advanced degree that the respondent listed is indicated. This included 37% of the Baby Boomers, 58% of the Generation Xers and 88% of the Millennials. This does not take into account those respondents who have already obtained a degree. Of particular note were the Millennials, twenty of whom indicated they planned to obtain at least a Bachelor Degree, including five who indicated a desire to obtain an advanced degree.

Of the OSFM certifications, while 15% of the Baby Boomers, and 29% of the Generation Xers indicate their intention to obtain OSFM Fire Officer I or II certification, 60% of the Millennials felt they would obtain this certification. When considering OSFM Fire Officer III certification, 17% of the Baby Boomers intend to obtain this certification while 49% of the Generations Xers and 56% of the Millennials intend to obtain OSFM Fire Officer III certification. Figure 5 (below) shows the education the respondents plan to obtain in the future, grouped by education.

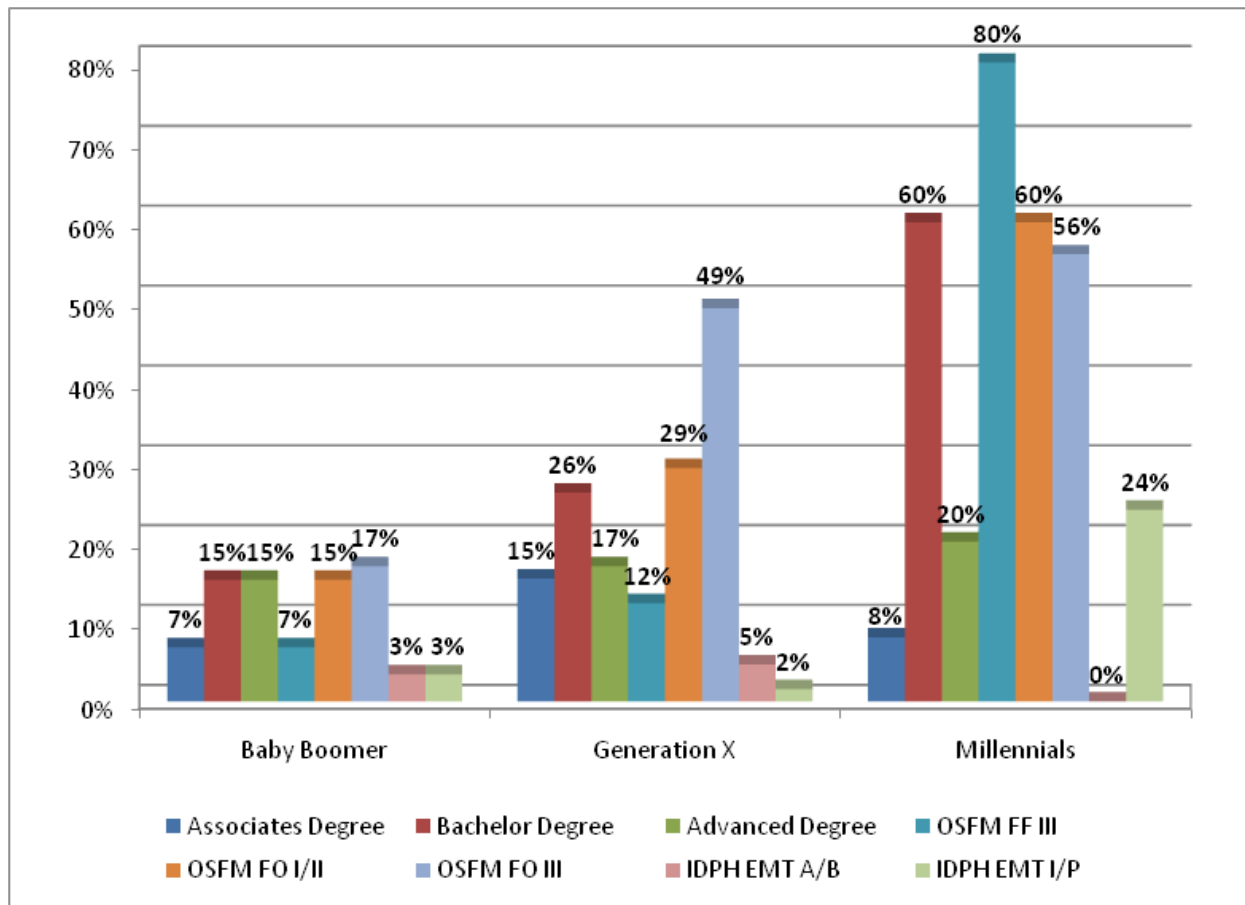


Figure 5 - Education Planned to Obtain

Questions ten through thirteen focus on the opinion of the respondents regarding formal degrees and the OSFM officer program and use a common set of possible responses. The respondents are forced to choose one of the following answers:

- Not important at all;
- May be a little important;
- Somewhat important;
- Very important;
- Should be required; and
- I have no opinion.

Survey Question Ten – How important do you feel a formal degree (Associates or Bachelors) is for a firefighter (not a line/chief officer)?

While 36% of the respondents felt that a formal degree was not important or only somewhat important, those numbers are influenced heavily by 25% of the Generation Xers and 40% of the Millennials believing that a formal degree may be a little important. Sixty-six respondents (44%) felt that a formal degree is somewhat important. While 20% of the Baby Boomers felt that a formal degree is very important, overall only 16% felt this way and 3% of all respondents felt that a formal degree should be required and 1% had no opinion. Figure 6 (below) indicates the degree of importance each generational group placed on a formal degree for a firefighter.

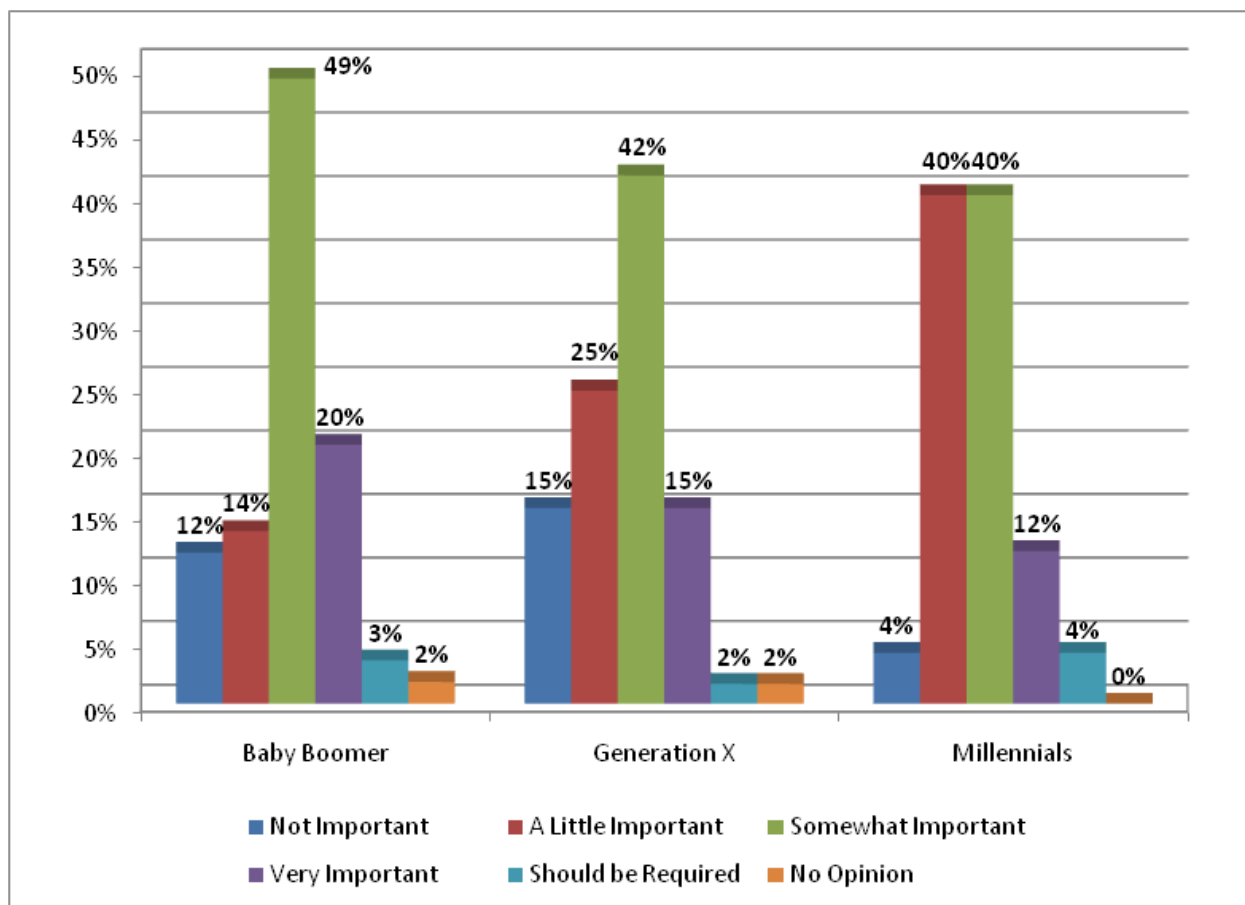


Figure 6 - Importance of a formal degree for a firefighter

Survey Question Eleven – How important do you feel a formal degree (Associates or Bachelors) is for a line officer (not a chief officer)?

Nineteen respondents (13%) indicated that a formal degree for line officers was not important at all or might be a little important and one responded indicated no opinion. However 38% of the respondents felt the degree for the line officer is somewhat important. While overall only 30% of the respondents felt that a formal degree is very important, 43% of the Generation Xers who responded to this question felt it was very important. And, while 20% of the respondents indicated that a formal degree should be required for line officers, only 11% of Generation Xers felt this way compared to 28% of the Millennials who responded. Figure 7 (below) represents the importance of a formal degree for line officers.

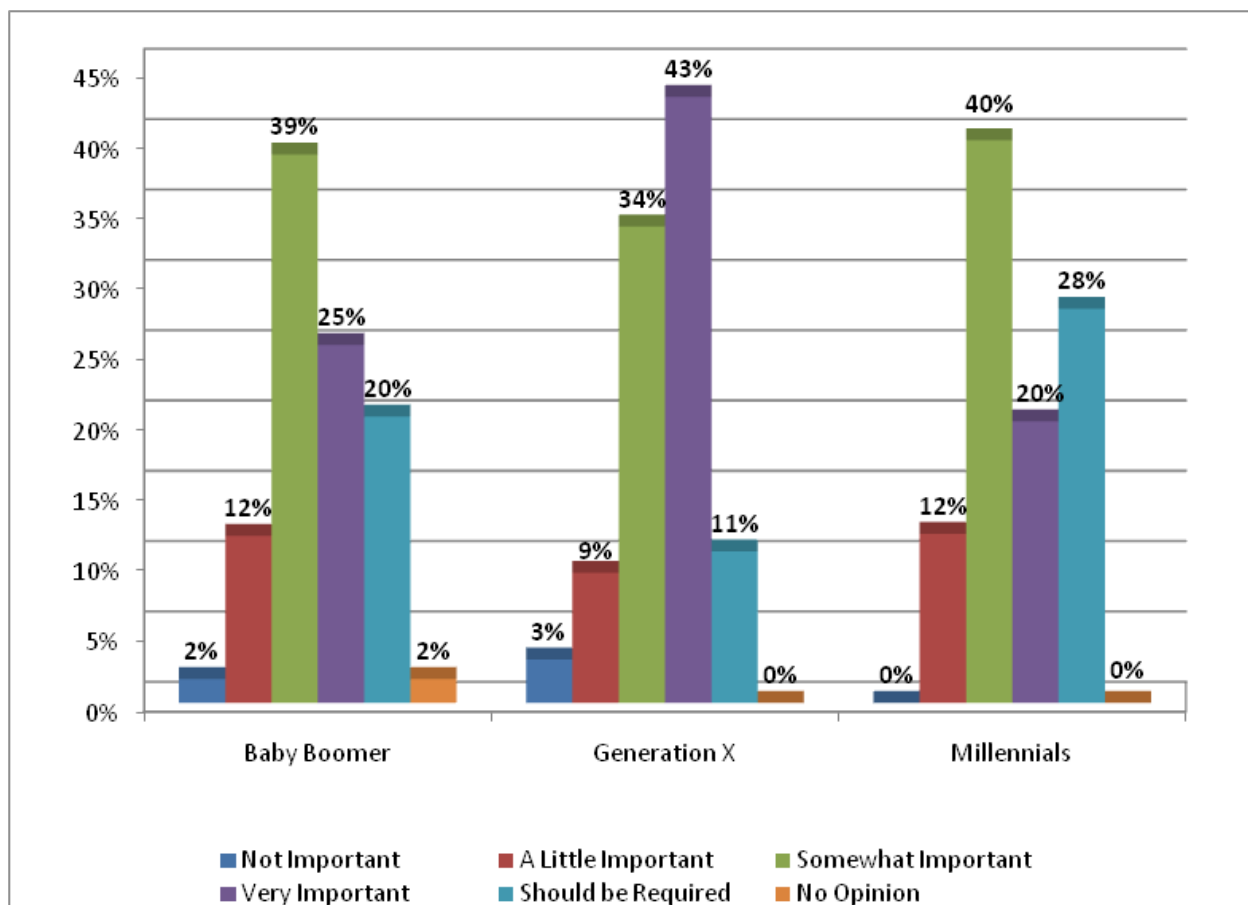


Figure 7 - Importance of a formal degree for a line officer

Survey Question Twelve – How important do you feel a formal degree (Associates or Bachelors) is for a chief officer?

Only four respondents (3%) indicated that a formal degree for a Chief Officer was not important or only a little important and one respondent had no opinion. Twenty-seven respondents (19%) indicated that a formal degree for a Chief Administrator was somewhat important, with 24% of Millennials feeling that way. Forty-eight respondents (30%) felt that a formal degree was very important, including 29% of Baby Boomers, 38% of Generation Xers and 24% of Millennials. The greatest response to this question indicated that a formal degree should be required for a Chief Administrator with 48% responding in this fashion. This included 51% of the Baby Boomers, 40% of the Generation Xers, and 52% of the Millennials. When considering both very important and required as a unit, 78% of the respondents responded affirmatively. This included 80% of the Baby Boomers, 78% of the Generation Xers and 76% of the Millennials. Figure 8 (below) indicates the respondents view on the importance of a formal degree for a Chief Officer.

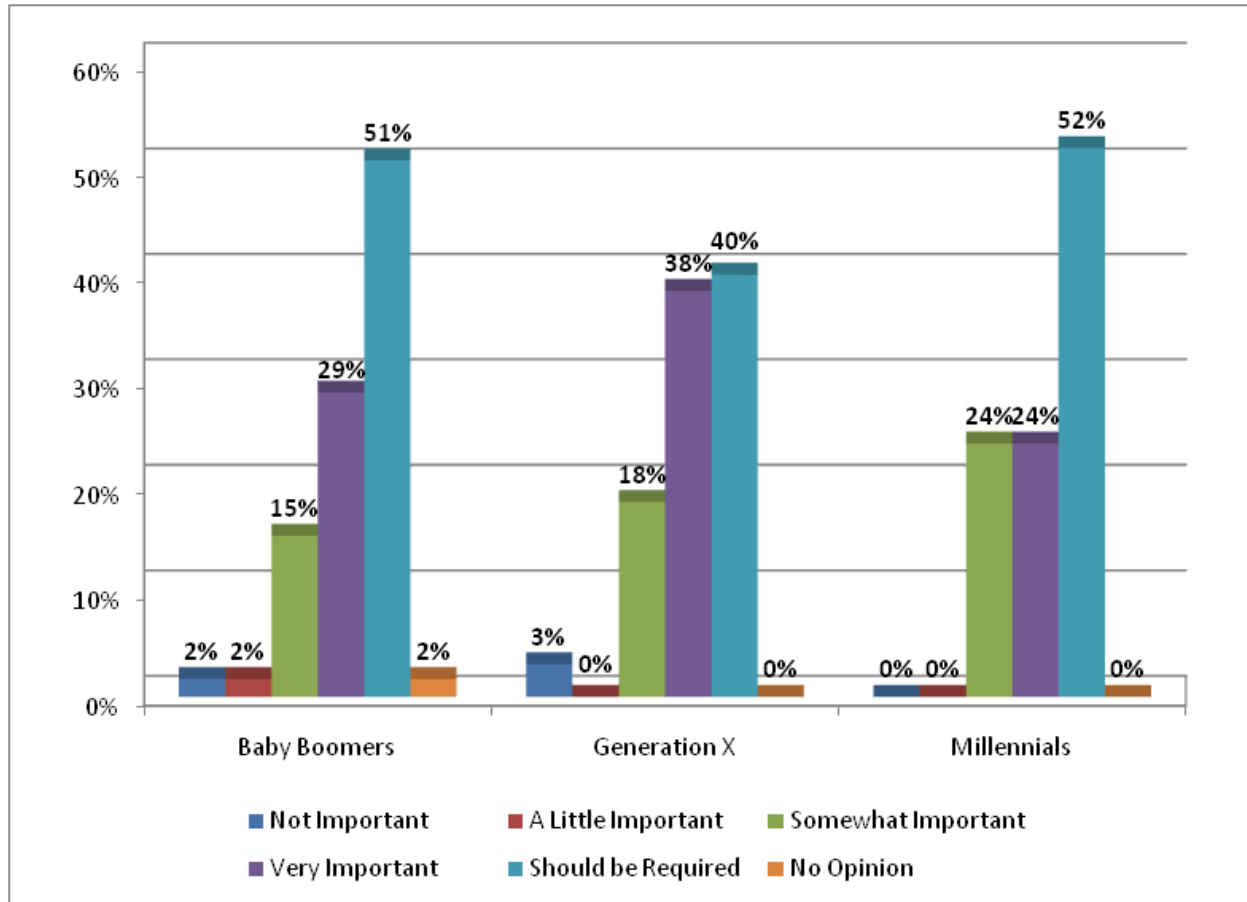


Figure 8 - Importance of a formal degree for a Chief Officer

Survey Question Thirteen – How important do you feel the current OSFM fire officer programs (FO I and FO II) are for a line officer?

Two of the respondents felt that the OSFM Fire Officer I or II programs were either not important or only a little important and five respondents had no opinion. Twenty-one respondents (15%) felt that the programs were only somewhat important, while fifty-six respondents (37%) felt the programs were very important and sixty-four (42%) felt that the certifications should be required. When the responses of very important and should be required are considered together, 79% of the respondents answered this way. Figure 9 (below) indicates the importance of Fire Officer I or II training for the Line Officer.

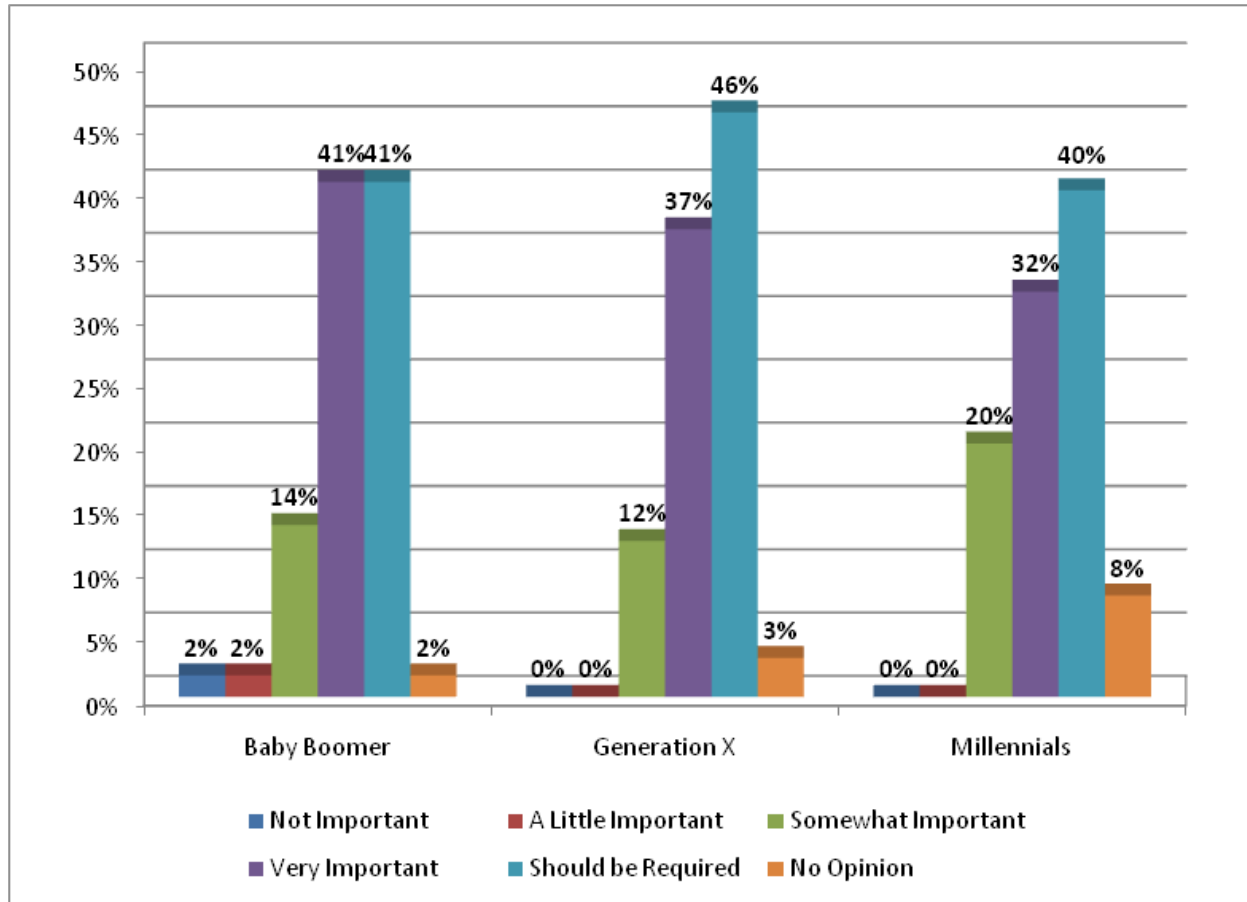


Figure 9 - Importance of fire officer training for line officers

Survey Question Fourteen – Compared to when you entered the fire service, do you think firefighting training:

The potential responses were:

- is much less effective;
- is a little bit less effective;
- is just as effective as it has been;
- is a little bit more effective;
- is much more effective; and
- I have no opinion.

Each respondent was forced to choose no more than one.

One respondent (a Baby Boomer) responded that the training now is much less effective and fourteen (9%) felt that training is a little less effective and eight (7%) had no opinion.

Thirty-six respondents (27%) felt that the training is just as effective as it has been, this included 14% of the Baby Boomers, 28% of the Generation Xers, and 40% of the Millennials. Thirty-one respondents (20%) indicated that training is a little bit more effective including 24% of the Baby Boomers, 20% of the Generation Xers, and 16% of the Millennials. Finally, fifty-nine respondents (37%) felt that training is much more effective now. This included 47% of the Baby Boomers, 38% of the Generation Xers and 24% of the Millennials. Figure 10 (below) indicates the respondents' indications of the effectiveness of training, grouped by generation.

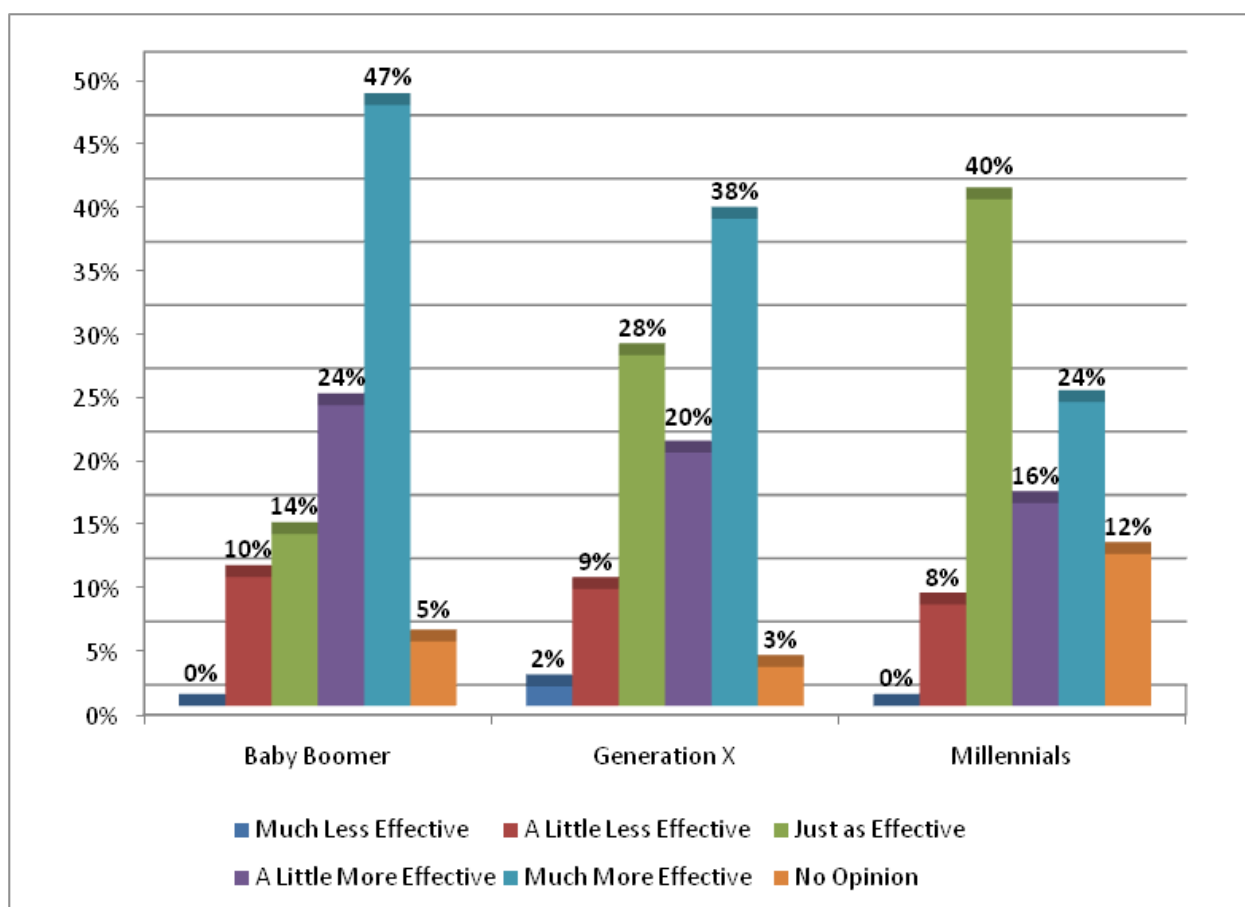


Figure 10 - Effectiveness of training

Survey Question Fifteen – Do you feel that the opportunity to gain firefighting experience was greater in the past than it is for current firefighters?

The available responses were Yes and No. In response to this question, 69% answered Yes and 31% answered No. The Yes responses included 73% of Baby Boomers, 66% of the Generation Xers and 68% of the Millennials.

Survey Question Sixteen – Do you feel that experience is important for a firefighter?

While the available choices were Yes or No, 100% of the respondents answered “Yes” to this question.

Survey Question Seventeen – How would you compare training and experience?

Three possible responses were available to the respondents:

- Training can’t replace experience;
- Training and experience are different, but equally important; and
- Training is more important than experience.

The overwhelming majority (93%) indicated that while they are different, training and experience are equally important. This included 98% of the Baby Boomers, 88% of the Generation Xers, and 92% of the Millennials. Nine respondents (5%) indicated that training can’t replace experience and two respondents indicated that training is more important than experience.

Survey Question Eighteen – When given an assignment, which of the following best describes how you prefer to have the task explained.

The three responses available were:

- Just give me a general idea of the objective; I can figure it out from there;
- Give me an idea of the objective and an explanation of why it needs to be done;
- Give me a detailed list of what needs to be done, how it should be done and why it is being done.

The majority of the respondents (56%) preferred to be given a general idea of the task, this included 59% of the Baby Boomers responding, 66% of the Generation Xers and 44% of the Millennials. Fifty respondents (34%) preferred being given the objective and an explanation of why it needs to be done and 9% (including 20% of the Millennials) indicated that they preferred more detail in the instructions.

Survey Question Nineteen – When given an assignment, I expect the supervisor to:

- Stay clear, I will let him know when I am done;
- Check in with me and give me ideas on how to improve what I am doing; and
- Stay close and provide direct feedback on how I am doing.

Sixty-four respondents (39%) indicated that they preferred the supervisor to stay clear. This included 49% of the Baby Boomers, 45% of the Generation Xers, and only 24% of the Millennials. Eighty-two (58%) were looking for supervisors to provide information on how to improve, including 49% of the Baby Boomers, 55% of the Generation Xers, and 68% of the Millennials. Only three respondents (one Baby Boomer and two Millennials) indicated that they would prefer the supervisor to stay close and provide direct feedback.

Survey Question Twenty – If possible for non-emergency assignments, I prefer instructions given to me:

- In written form;
- In an electronic message;
- Over the phone;
- Directly in person; and
- Doesn't matter.

The majority of respondents to this question indicated that it made no difference to them how instructions were relayed. This included 58% of the Baby Boomers, 51% of the Generation Xers, and 44% of the Millennials. The next most popular response was to receive directions directly in person with 38% of the respondents, including 25% of the Baby Boomers, 35% of the

Generation Xers, and 52% of the Millennials responding with this answer. The remaining choices were, Instructions in written form (6%), Electronic message (5%) and over the phone (one respondent).

Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal

According to the Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), there are 46,562 active firefighters in Illinois, as of August 2010. While the OSFM is unable to insure that the information is entirely accurate, when compared to the population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), this would indicate that there is about one firefighter for every 277 Illinois residents. A description of the programs evaluated in this research project is included below.

In an email dated August 20, 2010, Mitzi Woodson, Division Manager for the OSFM PSE division, provided data on selected OSFM programs in response to an email request for information (see Appendix A). The statistics from OSFM indicate that 49,877 firefighters have received Firefighter II certification since this certification was first offered in 1970. While only 633 certificates were issued prior to 1974 (when 2817 certificates were issued), at least 700 Firefighter II certificates have been issued each year since. This includes a low of 706 in 1979 and a high of 4250 in 1978. In the past ten years, 12,597 Firefighter II certificates were issued and at least 1000 certificates were issued each year with the exception of the current year where only 973 certificates have been issued to date (Woodson, 2010).

Since it was developed in 1970, the number of firefighters receiving Firefighter III certification is significantly less and includes only 17,518 certificates or about one firefighter out of every three who receive Firefighters II certification completes the required training to receive Firefighter III certification. Prior to 1975, only 23 Firefighter III certificates were issued. Each

year since however, OSFM has issued more than 100 Firefighter III certificates including a low of 173 in 1996 and a high of 984 in 1975. In the last ten years, 4729 Firefighter III certificates have been issued by the OSFM (Woodson, 2010). Figure 11 (below) indicates the number of Firefighter II and Firefighter III Certifications issued per year by the OSFM.

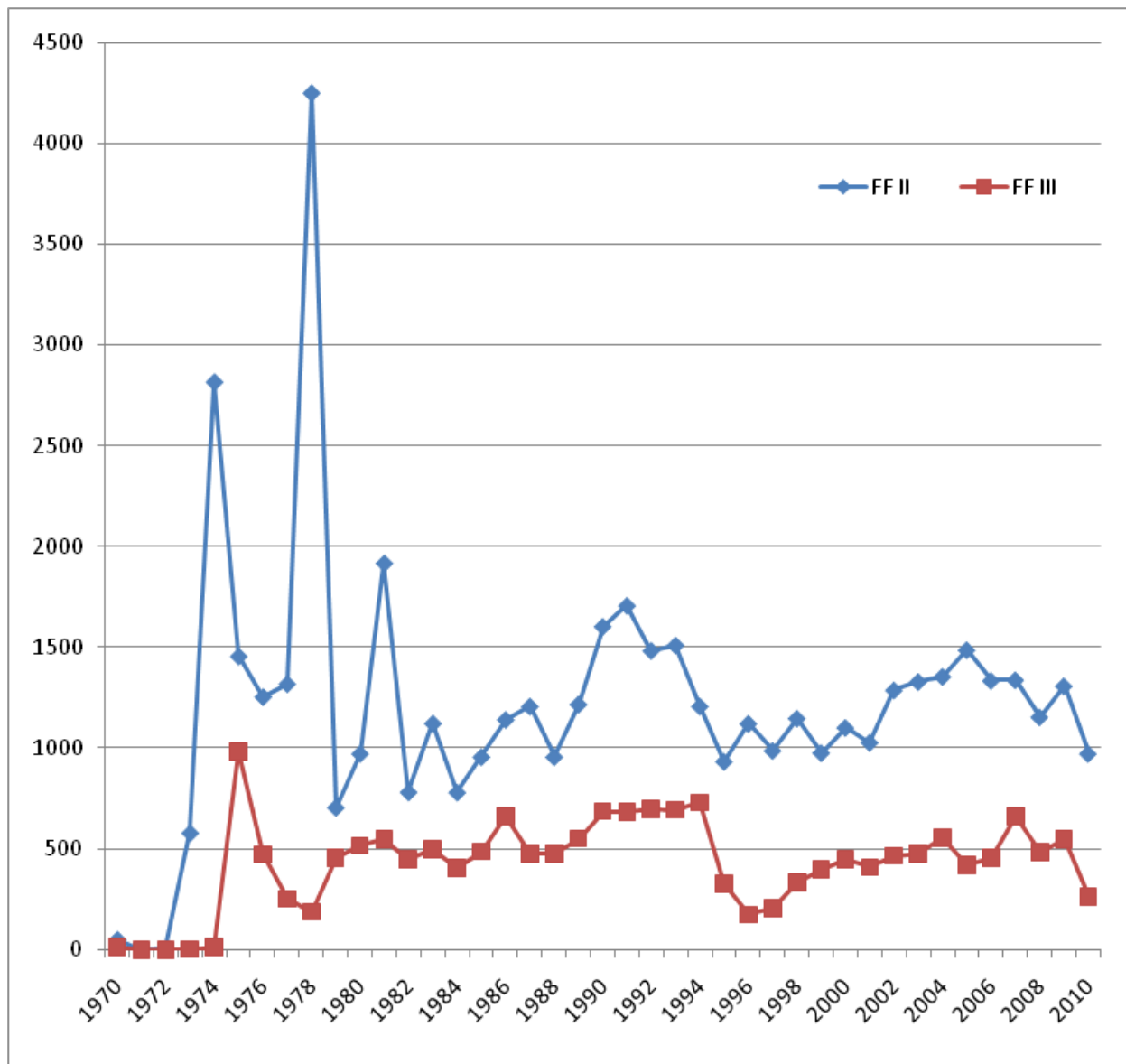


Figure 11- OSFM Firefighter II and II Certifications by year

Fire Officer I was first offered in 1976. Since 1980, the OSFM has issued 6018 Fire Officer I certificates. This includes a low of 93 in 1984 and a high of 274 in 2008. In the last ten

years, 2325 certificates have been issued or an average of 233 per year. In the first ten years the certification was offered, 1300 or an average of 130 certificates were awarded (Woodson, 2010).

Fire Officer II was first offered by the OSFM in 1979. Since that time, 2999 certificates have been granted by the OSFM. This includes a low of 27 in 1986 and a high of 168 in 2008. In the last ten years, 1294 certificates or an average of 129 per year have been awarded while only 506 or an average of 51 certificates were awarded in the first ten years Fire Officer II certification was available (Woodson, 2010).

The top fire officer certification in Illinois, Fire Officer III, has also been available since 1980. While only one certificate was issued in 1982, and only an average of six certificates per year were issued in the first ten years, a high of 20 certificates were issued in both 1999 and 2001. In the last ten years, 137 or an average of 14 Fire Officer III certificates were issued each year (Woodson, 2010). Figure 12 (on the following page) indicates the number of Fire Officer Certificates issued by OSFM, by year of issue.

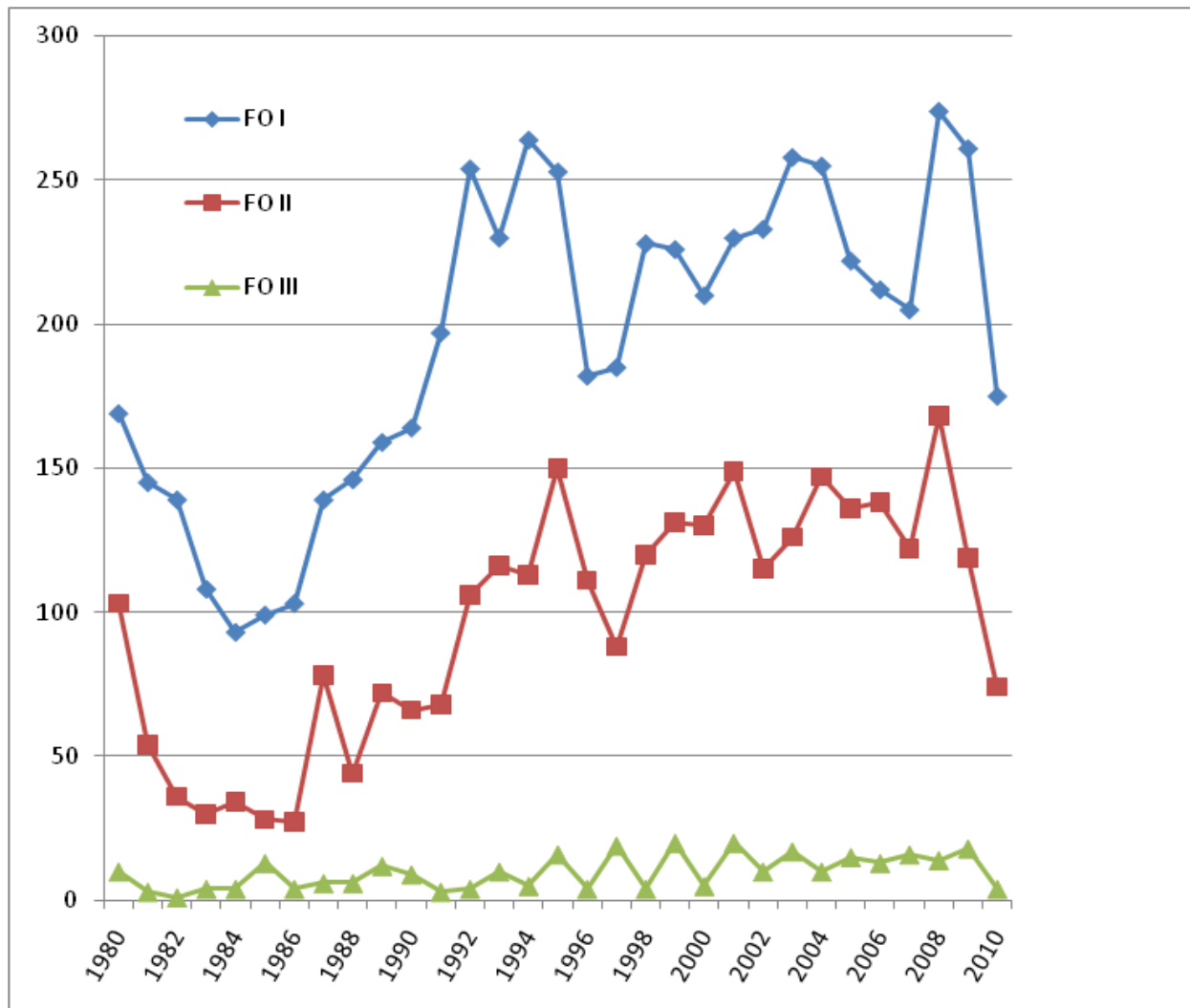


Figure 12 - Fire Officer Certificates issued by OSFM

Discussion

The literature concerning the different generations is voluminous and clearly demonstrates the distinction between the various generations. This is as true in the fire service as it is in the general workplace. Ten years ago, numerous research projects conducted as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program through the National Fire Academy sought to define the impact that Generation X was having on the fire service. The fire service was not alone with this concern. Numerous books and articles, as well as significant research efforts, were devoted to Generation X. Some of these are referenced in the literature review. Each of these sources

consistently refers to the difference between the generations, often attributing the differences to the environment that the individual has experienced.

The environment that Americans live in has had an impact on the fire service. The fact that the majority of Americans live in urban areas has caused the fire service to grow, as noted by the increase in the number of firefighters, can't be ignored. The fire service is rich with tradition, a tradition that has helped define the role of the fire service. Firefighters today are doing more than they ever have. The response to a wider variety of incidents, the emergence of EMS, and the promulgation of more laws and rules are among the developments that have contributed to pushing the fire service to adapt and change. This change is notably found in the education and training of firefighters.

The differences between the various generations have been a subject of research for quite some time. In the 1990's the concern was with Generation X moving into the workplace and the challenges that the mix of generations brought to the workplace. The fire service has seen the Generation Xers move into the workplace. In the survey conducted for this project, the largest group of firefighters who responded were the Generation Xers, who made up 44% of the responders. Of these Generation Xers, 37% have been promoted to supervisory positions and 9% indicate they have already attained Chief Officer status.

While the emergence of education has taken place nationwide, the surveys conducted for this research focused on the State of Illinois. This intentional limitation allowed the results to be consistently compared and clearer conclusions drawn. While the research did not extend beyond Illinois, the belief is that Illinois is similarly situated to the nation as a whole and the information gained may be extrapolated for use on a national basis.

Prior to 1970, evidence showing the existence of organized firefighter training programs

is minimal. In Illinois, the development of a fire officer education program in 1980 indicated the desire to grow as a profession. The Wingspread conferences were certainly foretelling when they sought to increase firefighter education.

While the sample size for this survey was clearly limited, it does show that Generation Xers are moving through the ranks of the fire service. Much of the literature about generational differences centered on the experiences that had influenced the generations as they grew up. Marston may put it the best when he writes “Each generation uses the word *success* differently” (2007, 113). Education has become very important in our society and the education, as distinguished by its growth, of firefighters is no exception. The education of firefighters has clearly risen, as has the education of the general population. College credit is very common among the respondents and some enter the fire service with a four year degree.

While the literature indicates there are four generational groups in the U.S. workforce today, and the same is likely true to some extent for the fire service, the respondents to this survey were only in the three latest generational groups, the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials. The survey showed that while no Millennials were working in the fire service prior to 2000, in the last five years, nearly 70% of the new firefighters were Millennials. This generational shift is clear and follows the shift in the general workplace. In only four years, the youngest of the Baby Boomers will be fifty years old, the age where career Illinois firefighters are eligible to retire and collect benefits. Within ten years, all but the youngest Baby Boomers will be sixty years old and, if historical statistical examples hold true, will have left or be leaving the fire service. The 2008 NFPA survey further supports this arguments when it indicates that 75% of all firefighters are between the ages of 20 and 50, and less than 6% are over the age of 60. There are no indications that the percentages will change significantly. (Karter & Stein,

2009)

While the education of the firefighters of these three generations varies, the significance may lie in the timing of the education. Of the 149 respondents to the survey, 94% indicated that they had some college and 100% of the Millennials indicated that they had some college. When reviewing those members who had received a college degree, only 64% of the respondents responded positively and only 44% of the Millennials indicated they had received a degree. While the number of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers receiving a degree is significantly higher (71% and 66% respectively), the specific reasons for this variance were not explored in this survey. One reason might be attributed to the general age of the generational groups. One might speculate that younger Millennials may not have actually had enough time to complete their degree and continue to actively pursue a degree. The survey did attempt to discover the education that existed at time of hire. In response to survey question six, the number of Millennials that currently have a degree exactly matched the number of Millennials hired with a degree. However 42% of the Baby Boomers and 28% of the Generation Xers obtained college degrees after they were hired. Unfortunately, this survey was not able to determine when the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers received their college degrees. There are indications that they received these degrees well into their fire service career.

Experience was the other factor that was reviewed in the survey and 100% of the respondents indicated that they felt experience was important. In response to the question about the ability to gain experience (Question 15), 69% of the respondents indicated that it was easier to gain experience in the past. While it was not stated as such, the perception is that most fire departments fight fewer fires than they did in the past. While this is a very desirable outcome for the public we protect as well as the fire service, fewer fires would naturally lead to a decrease in

experience. When asked to rate the importance of training when compared to experience, an overwhelming 93% of the respondents indicated that they are different but equally important. Additionally, 5% of the respondents indicated that training can't replace experience. While all the respondents feel that experience is important and 98% indicate that experience is as important as or more important than training, the ability to obtain this experience may hinder the newest firefighters.

Another question addressed in this research relates to the task assignment and, the direct correlation of how those tasks are then supervised. Survey Question 18 addressed this concern with 59% of the Baby Boomers and 66% of the Generation Xers indicating that, "given an objective they can figure it out from there", however only 44% of the Millennials chose this response. In contrast, only 3% of both the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers indicated they would like a more detailed explanation when 20% of the Millennials chose this response. This response indicates a clear difference in how assignments are viewed by the different generations. While it is difficult to speculate why this difference exists, one plausible explanation may be the lack of experience by the Millennials when compared to the other generational groups.

Another key to understanding how the assignments are viewed by the generational groups when they are given, centers on how that assignment is supervised. In this survey, 49% of the Baby Boomers and 45% of the Generation Xers indicated that they would prefer the supervisor leave them to complete the task. Only 24% of the Millennials chose this option. The second option given, having the supervisor provide ideas on improvement was selected by 49% of the Baby Boomers and 55% of the Generation Xers, but 68% of the Millennials chose this option and 8% of the Millennials chose the third option of direct supervision. This indicates that more than three quarters of the Millennials responding to this survey are looking for direct supervision.

When responding to Question 20 regarding how instructions are delivered, the majority of the respondents felt that it did not matter how the instructions were given, however only 44% of the Millennials responded in this fashion. They differed from the other generational groups with 52% indicating that they would prefer the directions directly in person and none responded that they would prefer directions through electronic message. It is surprising that this group would not want to receive electronic messages, given the fact that Millennials are known as being generally technologically savvy. But, it further demonstrates the concept that the lack of experience of the Millennial group leads it to search for assistance.

This research has strengthened the concerns that the Millennial firefighters are better educated than the other generational groups, particularly at time of hire, but are lacking the experience and the skills that follow this experience. While other possibilities certainly are available to explain why the gap between the Millennials and the other generational groups exist, there is little doubt that the experience levels are not equal. It is true that one might correctly comment that all firefighters had less experience when they were hired, and the Millennial generation is no different, however this group is better educated and appears more ready, from an education perspective, to move into leadership roles in the fire service. The challenge for the Pleasantview Fire District and the fire service in general is to find a method to guide the members of the Millennial generation while they continue to gain experience.

When Firefighter Bob Mangano discussed the fire service becoming the “Swiss Army Knife”, he did a good job of succinctly describing a changing (some might say “changed”) fire service. The fire service is not as much about fighting fire as it was in the past. Yes, fighting fire is the most hazardous part of our occupation, but it is only a very small percentage of what our members do. This high risk, low frequency activity remains a defining role of the fire

service, but the name “Fire Department” is becoming a misnomer. The metaphor Mangano offers seems to ring true. His other comment, that the fire service has become more “White Collar” (meaning that the skill set of the firefighter has changed becoming less “hands on”) has been proven out through this research. Firefighters are better educated, possess more technical knowledge and require a wider cadre of skills than ever before. While the future is always uncertain, there is little doubt that this trend will continue. The fire service must adapt to this change, using the skills of the Millennials and the experience of both the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers.

Recommendations

While the generational differences exist in any workplace, the impact on the fire service where experience is very important, is significant. With a focus on helping Millennials gain experience, an effort on the part of the other generational groups to assist in the educational process is vital.

The first recommendation is to promote a clear direction career path for newer firefighters. Much of this has been initiated by the efforts of the National Fire Academy and FESHE. This plan needs to include methods to not only provide education, but to incorporate an experience component into the process. The experience component needs to be multidimensional, providing skills necessary to manage the fire department operations.

The second recommendation involves the development of a process to facilitate the completion of routine tasks and responsibilities. The newest firefighters indicated that they desire more supervision than the more experienced firefighters. One method of providing this would be revising how firefighters are given assignments. The process is important and a

number of options are available. Providing the firefighter with the objective and detailing the tasks that need to be completed to meet that objective is certainly a concept worth pursuing.

One additional thought is to develop a consolidated system to compile information on both a state based program and a nationally based program. A program using the existing NFIRS system would seem to make sense and be relatively simple. With the increasingly complex technology available, it is surprising that an accurate accounting of the number of firefighters in the United States is not available. The lack of accurate information makes it difficult to determine an accurate status of firefighters. Without this information, it becomes very difficult to set a clear path.

While these recommendations may take some time to develop and implement, steps can be taken immediately to bridge the current gap. Fire service leaders need to realize that the newest firefighters are looking for additional direction. They need to embrace the skills the Millennials offer and work to provide clear direction and support to their efforts. While Baby Boomers and Generation Xers may not need or desire detailed instructions, Millennials do, and the leaders in the fire service need to accommodate this need.

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Appendix A – Information Request from OSFM

From: Woodson, Mitzi [Mitzi.Woodson@Illinois.gov] Sent: Fri 8/20/2010 1:54 PM
To: John Buckley
Cc:
Subject: RE: Research Project
Attachments:  _____

John,

Below is the statistical information that the office was able to determine in regards to your inquiries:

- How many firefighters are there in Illinois? Is there a breakdown by year? Volunteer vs. POC vs. Full Time?

Our records show that there are approximately **46,562** active firefighting incidents in Illinois. *This data represents incidents reported by Illinois Fire Departments to the PSE Webupdate System. The Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal cannot guarantee the completeness or accuracy of this data.*

There is not a breakdown by year and I cannot supply the statistical information for Volunteer vs. POC vs. Full Time as our information is from the fire service and not all departments participate.

- How many firefighters have been certified as FFII, FFIII, FOI, FOII, FOIII? Is there a breakdown of how many certified by year?

A spreadsheet is attached to answer this information.

- What year did OSFM begin certifying in each of these categories?

I can supply you the information of when the certifications were adopted as rules.

Firefighter II -	1970
Firefighter III-	1970
Fire Officer I-	1976
Fire Officer II-	1979
Fire Officer III-	1980

Also, the Fire Officer levels only include “full” certification statistics. I did not include any of the Provisional certification levels.

Good luck with your project.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Mitzi Woodson

*Division Manager
Division of Personnel Standards & Education
Office of the State Fire Marshal
217-785-1003*

From: John Buckley [mailto:jbuckley@plvw.org]
Sent: Wednesday, August 04, 2010 3:25 PM
To: Woodson, Mitzi
Subject: Research Project

Hi Mitzi-

I was wondering if you could help me out or point me in the direction of someone who could. I should start out by letting you know that if any of this requires substantial work on your part, don't worry about it. I can get by without it.

I am working on my research project for the Executive Fire Officer Program. The project deals with generational differences between firefighters and focuses on the differences between the training and education of current firefighters versus older firefighters. I put out the attached survey (in case you are interested) that is limited to Illinois Firefighters. The survey is also located at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PFTV8TR>.

What I was looking for from OSFM PSE was some statistical information. The thought would be to try to demonstrate the historical trend in Illinois. The areas of interest are:

- How many firefighters are there in Illinois? Is there a breakdown by year? Volunteer vs. POC vs. Full Time?
- How many firefighters have been certified as FFII, FFIII, FOI, FOII, FOIII? Is there a breakdown of how many certified by year?
- What year did OSFM begin certifying in each of these categories?

I understand that this may not be something that is readily available, so please don't be afraid to tell me to get lost.

Thanks for anything you can offer. Take care. JB

John Buckley
Pleasantview Fire Protection District
1970 Plainfield Road
LaGrange, IL 60525
708-352-9229x2261 voice
jbuckley@plvw.org

Appendix B – Statistical Information from OSFM

Year	FF II	FF III	FO I	FO II	FO III	Year	FF II	FF III	FO I	FO II	FO III
1970	51	11	0	0	0	1991	1707	683	197	68	3
1971	0	0	0	0	0	1992	1484	696	254	106	4
1972	2	0	0	0	0	1993	1511	692	230	116	10
1973	580	1	0	0	0	1994	1208	729	264	113	5
1974	2817	11	0	0	0	1995	934	326	253	150	16
1975	1456	984	0	0	0	1996	1122	173	182	111	4
1976	1255	472	0	0	0	1997	988	205	185	88	19
1977	1319	251	0	0	0	1998	1148	332	228	120	4
1978	4250	186	0	0	0	1999	977	395	226	131	20
1979	706	454	0	0	0	2000	1102	445	210	130	5
1980	973	515	169	103	10	2001	1028	408	230	149	20
1981	1918	547	145	54	3	2002	1288	464	233	115	10
1982	782	448	139	36	1	2003	1330	477	258	126	17
1983	1123	499	108	30	4	2004	1355	556	255	147	10
1984	781	403	93	34	4	2005	1487	417	222	136	15
1985	957	485	99	28	13	2006	1335	456	212	138	13
1986	1142	661	103	27	4	2007	1338	663	205	122	16
1987	1208	476	139	78	6	2008	1155	481	274	168	14
1988	957	474	146	44	6	2009	1308	545	261	119	18
1989	1218	550	159	72	12	2010	973	262	175	74	4
1990	1604	685	164	66	9	Total	49877	17518	6018	2999	299

Appendix C – Survey Example

The following survey is being used for the applied research project as part of the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Program. It focuses on the education and training you have received during your fire service career. All responses are completely anonymous. I greatly appreciate your participation in this short survey.

1) What year were you born?

- ☐ Before 1950
- ☐ Between 1950 and 1959
- ☐ Between 1960 and 1964
- ☐ Between 1965 and 1969
- ☐ Between 1970 and 1974
- ☐ Between 1975 and 1979
- ☐ Between 1980 and 1984
- ☐ Between 1985 and 1990
- ☐ After 1990

2) What year did you join the fire service as a firefighter?
(do not include Cadet, Explorer or Junior Firefighter programs)

- ☐ Before 1980
- ☐ Between 1980 and 1984
- ☐ Between 1985 and 1989
- ☐ Between 1990 and 1994
- ☐ Between 1995 and 1999
- ☐ Between 2000 and 2004
- ☐ Between 2005 and 2009
- ☐ 2010

3) Which type of fire department are you currently part of?
(choose all that apply)

- ☐ Volunteer (not paid)
- ☐ Paid on Call or Part Time
- ☐ Career (full time occupation)

4) Which of the following best indicates your current job description?

- ☐ Firefighter
- ☐ Line Officer
- ☐ Shift Commander
- ☐ Administrator/Chief Officer

5) When you were hired, which of the following were REQUIRED prior to hiring?
(Please choose all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> No Education Requirement | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Firefighter II Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> High School Diploma | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Firefighter III Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Some College | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Officer I or II Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Associates Degree | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Officer III Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Bachelors Degree | <input type="radio"/> IDPH EMT- A or EMT-B Licensure |
| <input type="radio"/> Advanced (Masters/Doctoral Degree) | <input type="radio"/> IDPH EMT-I or EMT-P Licensure |

6) When you were hired, which of the following did you have prior to hiring?
(Please choose all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> No Education | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Firefighter II Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> High School Diploma | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Firefighter III Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Some College | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Officer I or II Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Associates Degree | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Officer III Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Bachelors Degree | <input type="radio"/> IDPH EMT- A or EMT-B Licensure |
| <input type="radio"/> Advanced (Masters/Doctoral Degree) | <input type="radio"/> IDPH EMT-I or EMT-P Licensure |

7) In your current position, which of the following are you REQUIRED to have?
(Please choose all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> No Education Requirement | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Firefighter II Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> High School Diploma | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Firefighter III Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Some College | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Officer I or II Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Associates Degree | <input type="radio"/> OSFM Officer III Certification |
| <input type="radio"/> Bachelors Degree | <input type="radio"/> IDPH EMT- A or EMT-B Licensure |
| <input type="radio"/> Advanced (Masters/Doctoral Degree) | <input type="radio"/> IDPH EMT-I or EMT-P Licensure |

8) Which of the following do you currently have?
(Please choose all that apply)

- ☐ No Education
- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ Some College
- ☐ Associates Degree
- ☐ Bachelors Degree
- ☐ Advanced (Masters/Doctoral Degree)
- ☐ OSFM Firefighter II Certification
- ☐ OSFM Firefighter III Certification
- ☐ OSFM Officer I or II Certification
- ☐ OSFM Officer III Certification
- ☐ IDPH EMT- A or EMT-B Licensure
- ☐ IDPH EMT-I or EMT-P Licensure

9) During your fire service career, which of the following do you expect to obtain. Please do not include those you already have.
(Please choose all that apply)

- ☐ No Additional Education/I have all these
- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ Some College
- ☐ Associates Degree
- ☐ Bachelors Degree
- ☐ Advanced (Masters/Doctoral Degree)
- ☐ OSFM Firefighter II Certification
- ☐ OSFM Firefighter III Certification
- ☐ OSFM Officer I or II Certification
- ☐ OSFM Officer III Certification
- ☐ IDPH EMT- A or EMT-B Licensure
- ☐ IDPH EMT-I or EMT-P Licensure

10) How important do you feel a formal degree (Associates or Bachelors) is for a firefighter (not a line/chief officer)?

- ☐ Not important at all
- ☐ May be a little important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Should be required
- ☐ I have no opinion

11) How important do you feel a formal degree (Associates or Bachelors) is for a line officer (not a chief officer)?

- ☐ Not important at all
- ☐ May be a little important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Should be required
- ☐ I have no opinion

12) How important do you feel a formal degree (Associates or Bachelors) is for a chief officer?

- ☐ Not important at all
- ☐ May be a little important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Should be required
- ☐ I have no opinion

13) How important do you feel the current OSFM fire officer programs (FO I and FO II) are for a line officer?

- ☐ Not important at all
- ☐ May be a little important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Should be required
- ☐ I have no opinion

14) Compared to when you entered the fire service, do you think firefighter training:

- ☐ is much less effective
- ☐ is a little bit less effective
- ☐ is just as effective as it has been
- ☐ is a little bit more effective
- ☐ is much more effective
- ☐ I have no opinion

15) Do you feel that the opportunity to gain firefighting experience was greater in the past then it is for current firefighters?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

16) Do you feel that experience is important for a firefighter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

17) How would compare training and experience?

- ☐ Training can't replace experience
- ☐ Training and experience are different, but equally important
- ☐ Training is more important than experience

18) When given an assignment, which of the following best describes how you prefer to have the task explained.

- Just give me a general idea of the objective, I can figure it out from there
- Give me an idea of the objective and an explanation of why it needs to be done
- Give me a detailed list of what needs to be done, how it should be done and why it is being done

19) When given an assignment, I expect a supervisor to:

- Stay clear, I will let him know when I am done
- Check in with me and give me ideas on how to improve what I am doing
- Stay close and provide direct feedback on how I am doing

20) If possible for non emergency assignments, I prefer instructions given to me:

- In written form
- In a electronic message
- Over the phone
- Directly in person
- Doesn't matter

Thank you for participating in this survey. If you are interested in the reviewing the results of

this survey, please send an email to jbuckley@plvw.org.